

Degas

Edgar

DEGAS

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293

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Edgar Degas and his Works | 7 |
| Letters by Degas | 49 |
| Notes | 196 |
| Index | 197 |



EDGAR DEGAS AND HIS WORKS



Edgar Degas was closest to Pierre-Auguste Renoir in the Impressionist's circle, for both favoured the animated Parisian life of their day as a motif in their paintings. Degas did not attend Charles Gleyre's studio; most likely he first met the future Impressionists at the Café Guerbois. It is not known exactly where he met Édouard Manet. Perhaps they were introduced to one another by a mutual friend, the engraver Félix Bracquemond, or perhaps Manet, struck by Degas' audacity, first spoke to him at the Louvre in 1862. Two months after meeting the Impressionists, Degas exhibited his canvases with Claude Monet's group, and became one of the most loyal of the Impressionists: not only did he contribute works to each of their exhibitions except the seventh, he also participated very actively in organising them. All of which is curious, because he was rather distinct from the other Impressionists.

Degas came from a completely different milieu than that of Monet, Renoir, and Alfred Sisley. His grandfather René-Hilaire de Gas, a grain merchant, had been forced to flee from France to Italy in 1793 during the French Revolution. Business prospered for him there. After establishing a bank in Naples, de Gas wed a young girl from a rich Genoan family. Edgar preferred to write his name simply as Degas, although he happily maintained relations with his numerous de Gas relatives in Italy.

Enviably stable by nature, Degas spent his entire life in the neighbourhood where he was born. He scorned and disliked the Left Bank, perhaps because that was where his mother had died. In 1850, Edgar Degas completed his studies at Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and, in 1852, received his degree in law. Because his family was rich, his life as a painter unfolded far more smoothly than for the other Impressionists.

Degas started his apprenticeship in 1853 at the studio of Louis-Ernest Barrias and, beginning in 1854, studied under Louis Lamothe, who revered Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres above all others and transmitted his adoration for this master to Edgar Degas. Degas' father was not opposed to his son's choice. On the contrary: when, after the death of his wife, he moved to Rue Mondovi, he set up a studio for Edgar on the fourth floor, from which the Place de la Concorde could be seen over the rooftops. Edgar's father himself was an amateur painter and connoisseur; he introduced his son to his many friends. Among them were Achille Deveria, curator of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Bibliothèque Nationale, who permitted Edgar to copy from the drawings of the Old Masters: Rembrandt, Dürer, Goya, Holbein. His father also introduced him to his friends in the Valpinçon family of art collectors, at whose home the future painter met the great Ingres. All his life Degas would remember Ingres' advice as one would remember a prayer: "Draw lines ... Lots of lines, whether from memory or from life" (Paul Valéry, *Écrits sur l'Art [Writings on Art]*, Paris, 1962, p. 187).

Starting in 1854, Degas travelled frequently to Italy: first to Naples, where he made the acquaintance of his numerous cousins, and then to Rome and Florence where he copied tirelessly from the Old Masters. His drawings and sketches already revealed very clear preferences: Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Andrea Mantegna, but also

Self-Portrait Saluting, 1865.
Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 66.5 cm.
Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.

Young Spartans Exercising, c. 1860.
Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 155 cm.
The National Gallery, London.

Scene of War in the Middle Ages
(detail), 1865.
Oil on paper, on canvas, 83.5 x 148.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris. (pp. 10-11)





Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio, Titian, Fra Angelico, Uccello, and Botticelli. He went to Orvieto Cathedral specifically to copy from the frescoes of Luca Signorelli, and visited Perugia and Assisi. The pyrotechnics of Italian painting dazzled him. Degas was lucky like no other. One can only marvel at the sensitivity Edgar's father demonstrated with respect to his son's vocation, at his insight into his son's goals, and at the way he was able to encourage the young painter. "You've taken a giant step forwards in your art, your drawing is strong, your colour tone is precise," he wrote his son. "You no longer have anything to worry about, my dear Edgar, you are progressing beautifully. Calm your mind and, with tranquil and sustained effort, stick to the furrow that lies before you without straying. It's your own – it is no one else's. Go on working calmly, and keep to this path" (J. Bouret, *Degas*, Paris, 1987, p. 23).

In 1855, Degas began to pursue studies at the École des beaux-arts, but did not show any particular zeal for his work. Degas preferred to learn at the museums. As soon as his first vacation arrived, Degas took the opportunity to return to Italy. There, at the Villa Medici, fate brought him into contact with residents of the École des beaux-arts who would become his friends: the painters Léon Bonnat, Henri Fantin-Latour, Élie Delaunay, Gustave Moreau, the sculptors Paul Dubois and Henri Chapu, and the musician Georges Bizet, who had not yet composed *Carmen*. Their gatherings in the old neighbourhoods of Rome, and the picnics with the beauties of the Italian landscape in the background, would remain impressed on his memory to the end of his life.

In the 1850s, Degas started doing portraits and self-portraits. From the very beginning in Degas' portraits, one senses an attentive observer of human psychology. In Italy he began to paint portraits of his family members. One of his very first is an admirable portrait of his grandfather, *René-Hilaire de Gas*, it is reminiscent of Titian's portraits to mind. Its professional quality and Degas' ease in handling the idiom of classical painting makes it possible to compare it to portraits by Ingres. This canvas foretells a future for the painter as a great portraitist. And he indeed became a remarkable portraitist. During the 1850s Degas began to paint the portraits of members of the Bellelli family, that of his father's sister, who had married Baron Bellelli. He did composition studies, sketched the baron and his wife, painted his own cousins Giulia and Giovannini, and studied the hands of his subjects. The result was a large painting – 200 by 253 centimetres, and painted in Paris, *The Bellelli Family*, that recalls the portraits of Hans Holbein, Jean Clouet, or Diego Velázquez. But the sky-blue wallpaper with small white flowers lightens the colour scheme, and gives the painting the cozy, intimate feel of a life of ease. The classical balance of the composition is broken, completely unexpectedly by a single detail: the master of the house, seated with his back to the viewer, turns so spontaneously and with such liveliness towards his wife that, in an instant, the impression of models in the act of posing vanishes. With his solid training in classical principles, the painter is beginning to turn, little by little, towards the modern life which will soon absorb him completely.

Mlle Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source"
(detail), 1866-1868.
Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 91.4 cm.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.





The enormous painting *The Daughter of Jephthah* is full of the influences of different masters, from Nicolas Poussin to Raphael, and Eugène Delacroix. The painting *Scene of War from the Middle Ages* (pp. 10-11) or *The Misfortunes of the City of Orléans*, with its baffling subject, could have been drawn from a tale that Degas' grandfather, who was originally from Orléans, had told him. It reminds one of Delacroix. As early as the 1850s he discovered two absolutely new and unexpected subjects: horses and the ballet. In 1859, the Valpinçon family invited Edgar to spend a few weeks at their estate in Ménil-Hubert-sur-Orne where they had a horse-breeding farm. His eye noted their proportions, the particularities of the horse's skeleton, and the play of its muscles. After his first rather complex compositions depicting racetracks, Degas learned the art of translating the nobility and elegance of horses, their nervous movements, and the formal beauty of their musculature *The Parade (Racehorses in front of the Tribunes)*.

Around the middle of the 1860s Degas made yet another discovery. In 1866, he painted his first composition with ballet as a subject: *Mademoiselle Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source"* (p. 13). Degas frequently attended the Paris Opera, where, in 1866, Eugénie Fiocre often danced *The Spring*. It's true that, in this first painting, the ballet itself was not yet depicted. It was more a portrait of the ballet dancer. Mlle Fiocre is seated on stage surrounded by Oriental scenery with a horse at her side. Degas had always been a devotee of the theatre, but from this time on, it would become more and more the focus of his art. It gradually permeated his painting through his portraiture. After Mlle Fiocre, he turned to painting portraits of musicians.

In 1869 he did an admirable portrait of his father with Lorenzo Pagans, the musician: *Degas' Father Listening to Lorenzo Pagans Playing the Guitar*. Pagans occupies the foreground, wholly absorbed in his music, a guitar in his hands. In spite of the almost classical construction of the composition and the seemingly static nature of the subjects, there is action in this painting: Pagans is gently strumming and Degas' father is listening. This becomes a characteristic aspect of Degas' art. Like Manet and the Impressionists, he rejects subject and literary narrative, but in his own paintings there is always something happening. Also in 1869, Degas painted *The Orchestra at the Opera* (p. 17).

At first glance this painting is also just a portrait of musicians. In fact it is a portrait of a whole group of the painter's friends, whom his imagination has gathered together in the orchestra pit. The faces are painted in close up, they are individualised, they have character, and, above all, they are not posing, but, instead, are engrossed in the music. Before Edgar Degas, nothing like this had ever been done before. Three years later, in 1872, Degas' first painting devoted solely to the ballet appeared: *Le Foyer de la danse à l'Opéra de la rue Le Peletier (The Dance Foyer at the Opera on the rue Le Peletier)* (p. 23). Degas moved from the theatre on to the rehearsal halls, where the dancers practised and took their lessons. This was how Degas arrived at the second sphere of that immediate, everyday life that was of interest to him. The ballet would remain his passion until the end of his days.

Woman Ironing, c. 1869.
Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 73.5 cm.
Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

When the Franco-Prussian war began in 1870, Degas enlisted in the French National Guard artillery. It was during his service in the army that he learned he might lose his eyesight, which would have a tragic impact on his life.

In 1872, Degas went to New Orleans to visit his mother's relatives who were cotton traders. Although the purpose of the trip was business, he sketched a great deal. Though by nature disinclined to react with much emotion, he was happy with his new impressions all the same. For the 1874 Impressionist exhibition, Degas contributed canvases and drawings with motifs that, from then on, would forever be associated with him: the theatre, ballet classes, washerwomen, racetracks, and nudes. In the exhibition that followed, portraits, milliners, and paintings executed from impressions of New Orleans appeared. Cabarets and the circus would come later. At the beginning of his development as an Impressionist, two paintings represented extremely important steps.

Degas was the only painter of his generation who took photography seriously. He took interest in it rather late, in the middle of the 1880s, and bought a camera around 1895. This proves that the unique features of Degas' compositions do not relate to the direct influence of the camera, but to the specificity of his own vision of the world. When he began to take photographs himself, it was his vision that influenced the compositions of his photographs, not the other way around.

In 1876, Degas painted *The Absinthe Drinker (Glass of Absinthe)* (p. 41). At that time the artists had already abandoned the Café Guerbois and reunited at La Nouvelle Athènes in the Place Pigalle. Degas had lived in this neighbourhood for a large portion of his life: in rue Blanche, rue Fontaine, and rue Saint-Georges. He could now regularly be found in the evenings on the terrace of La Nouvelle Athènes with Édouard Manet, Émile Zola, and various Impressionists and critics. For his new painting he asked his friend, engraver Marcellin Desboutin, just back from Florence, and the pretty actress Ellen Andrée to pose for him. Ellen Andrée would later pose at the same location, on the terrace of La Nouvelle Athènes, for Manet's *The Plum*, and also for Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party on the island of Croissy*. Degas depicted her as a prostitute of the Parisian streets with a lost look, sitting absolutely still before a glass of absinthe, absorbed in thought. At her side, a pipe clenched between his teeth and hat pushed to the back of his head, one of the café regulars is seated. He also seems to be looking into the distance, not aware of the woman seated just beside him. Squeezed into a corner behind little empty tables, they are almost touching one other, but each is in their own world. Again, Degas has succeeded in setting down on the canvas something almost impossible to capture: the bitter solitude of a human being in one of the merriest, liveliest cities in the world.

The Orchestra at the Opera (detail),
c. 1870.
Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 46 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Interior (The Rape) (detail), c. 1868-1869.
Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 116.3 cm.
The Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts,
Philadelphia. (pp. 18-19)

One of the main differences between Degas' ideas and those of the other Impressionists was his point of view regarding open-air painting. For all the others, open-air painting was both an aim and an essential condition of their work. However, with Degas, it was not living









nature that caused a landscape to appear on paper or canvas. On the contrary, it was a shape or a line seen at random that would give birth to a landscape in his imagination. Degas' odd attitude towards landscapes had two explanations, however. Firstly, Degas' greatest misfortune must not be forgotten, the weakness of his eyesight. What was most important, though, was that Degas had more confidence in his prodigious memory than in a fleeting impression.

The second difference between Degas and the Impressionists was in his attitude towards drawing. Renoir and his friends had been accused of not knowing how to draw because, in their work, the vibrations of air and light had the effect of blurring their line; their colour predominated over their drawing. For Degas drawing always came first.

After the death of Degas' father in 1873, the Degas family bank failed and there was nothing left for the painter but to rely on his art. Like the other Impressionists, he suffered from the fact that his paintings were impossible to sell and, like Renoir, Monet, Sisley, and Camille Pissarro, he went to Durand-Ruel to ask for money. And, like Sisley, he never painted commissions, he worked only on what interested him. He kept repeating, reworking, and varying his same favourite motifs, he liked improving himself. His friends recounted how he could start over and over again on one and the same work without ever fully completing it.

At the close of the 1870s, Degas added cabaret scenes to his repertoire – before Manet painted his *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. What is represented in *The Absinthe Drinker* is, in fact, the work of a stage or film director. In 1877, Degas painted two paintings, *Women on a Café Terrace*, sometimes called *Café, Boulevard Montmartre* (p. 69) and *Café Concert at Les Ambassadeurs* (p. 128). In these, the painter seems to be representing a moment glimpsed at random. Objectively and instantaneously the painter sets down on canvas the posturing, gestures, and expressions of the ladies as they chatter among themselves. "M. Degas seems to have hurled a challenge at the Phillistines, that is to say the classicists," wrote the critic Alexandre Pothey in an article on the third exhibition of the Impressionists. "The women in *Women on a Café Terrace* are frighteningly realistic. These painted, withered creatures, reeking of vice, cynically recounting the events and gestures of the day – you've seen them, you know them, and you'll come across them again on the boulevards soon" (L. Venturi, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 303).

It seems strange that as refined an artist as Degas, a frequenter of society salons, would have been aware in Paris of those washerwomen and pressers who became the objects of his study. Yet, when he was in New Orleans and felt nostalgic for France, it was the washerwomen who embodied and symbolised the French life of his time for him, to which he dreamt of returning as quickly as possible. He drew women leaning over their irons and found an original grace and beauty in their repetitive movements. His firm line set down the mechanics of their movements, while the colour, by means of a few light patches, gave the appearance of a black and white photograph as it is being developed (*Two Laundresses*, p. 54).

The Ballet from "Robert le Diable", 1871.
Oil on canvas, 66 x 54.3 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.

He painted ballet classes during lessons and as the dancers rested. It was rare for a ballet dancer to appear on his canvases as an airy, ethereal vision. Drawing, in these instances, makes way for colour to play the principal role. In the unreal atmosphere of the stage, the pink, sky-blue, and white tutus glitter and disappear. Most often, the ballet dancer in a Degas work is shown simply as a woman exhausted from pushing herself too hard. She has lost her stage charm. She exercises endlessly at the bar, and she strains as she stretches her tired legs. She is weak and miserable. The truth of everyday life would enter in at the moments when the ballet dancer was protected from the gaze of strangers, or when, bent over with fatigue, she would have to go through the humiliation of a long wait to be seen by the theatrical director (*Waiting*, New York, Havemeyer Collection).

At the sixth Impressionist exhibition everyone marvelled at the wax statuette of a ballet dancer, almost one metre high, *The Little Ballet Dancer* (p. 107). The tutu was of real white tulle, the bodice of waxed yellow canvas, the hair was knotted in a ponytail with a red satin ribbon, and the ballet slippers had yellow laces. Upright, in ballet position, her hands are behind her back, her head thrown back. "With her tarlatan petticoat, skinny, and as ugly as can be," wrote the critic Charles Ephrussi, "but standing erect, arching back, and swaying, with that angular movement common to dance apprentices. She is rendered firmly, boldly, and with shrewdness, in a way that conveys, with infinite wisdom, the private demeanor and manner as well as the profession, embodied in the person ... An ordinary artist would have turned this dancer into a puppet. M. Degas has turned her into a distinct, incisive, technically precise work, and in a truly original form" (*Degas Inédit [Degas Unedited]*, op. cit., p. 336-337).

The nude was no less important as an object of study for Degas: he drew it tirelessly all his life. "The same subject has to be done ten, a hundred times. Nothing in art should look like an accident, even movement" (J. Bouret, op. cit., p. 58). Movement, still more movement, always movement ... Professional models would pose for Degas; his demands seemed absurd to them. Instead of sitting the young woman down or placing her, standing, in a well defined pose, he asked her to dry herself and do up her hair. Was the painter even drawing her? No: he stood standing against the wall, arms folded across his chest, watching her. Occasionally he climbed on a stool and watched her from above. Only after the model left would he begin to draw. Degas gained access to a world that, until then, had never let people from the outside come near: he represented women in their private surroundings, which belonged to them alone. He drew them in poses in which it is impossible to pose. She washes, squatting, in the bathtub. She combs her long hair, which a moment later she will toss back. Twisting around clumsily, she dries her back. Each drawing and each pastel seems to represent one image from an endless film of women washing and grooming themselves.

As he grew older, Degas made more and more sculpture. "With my eyesight going," he said to the dealer Vollard, "I now have to take up blind men's work" (J. Bouret, op. cit., p. 209).

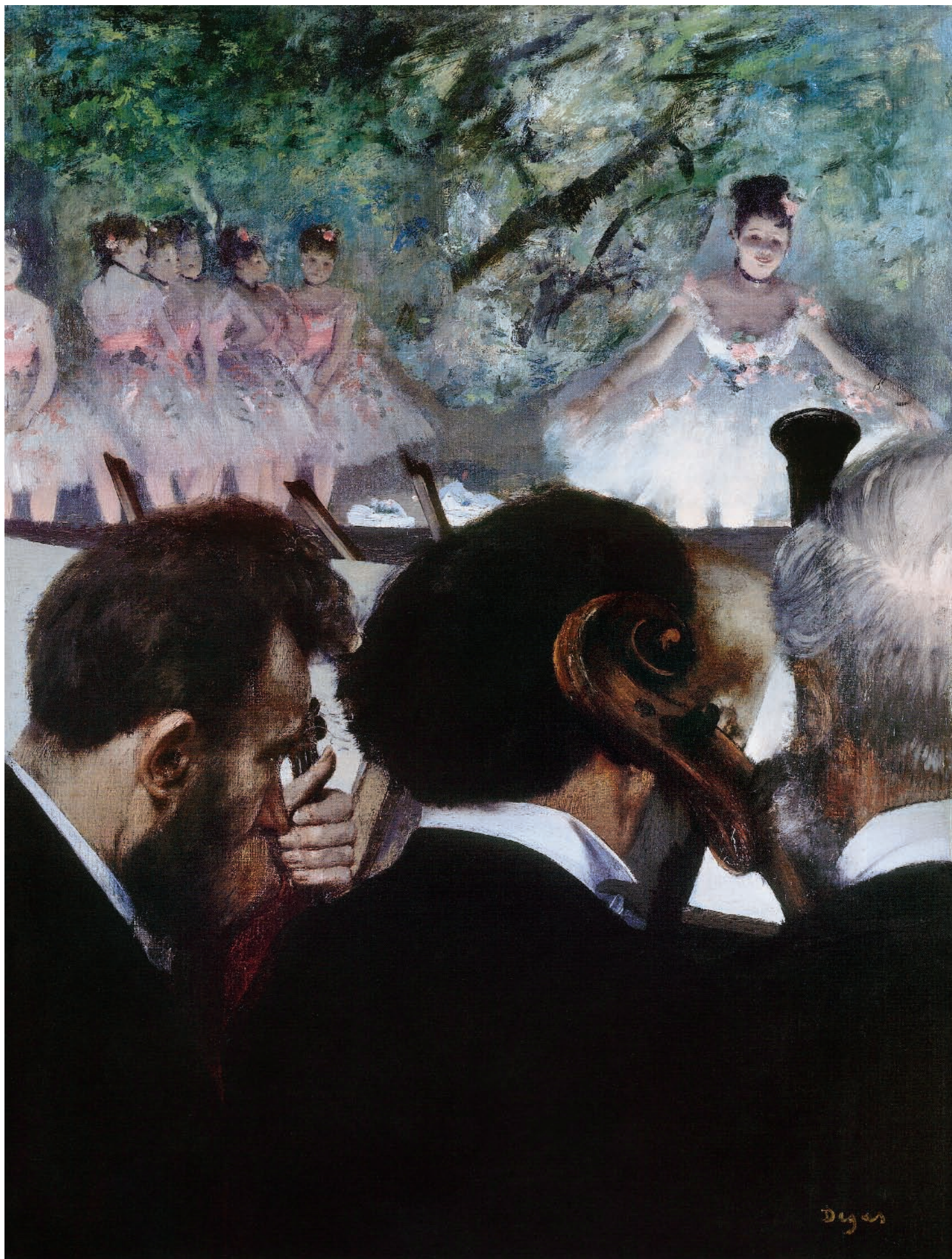
The Dance Foyer at the Opera on the rue Le Peletier, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 32.7 x 46.3 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

The Dancing Class (detail), c. 1870.
Oil on wood, 19.7 x 27 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York. (pp. 24-25)









He modelled, in wax, what he knew best: ballet dancers, horses, and nudes. Ambroise Vollard was crestfallen to see how Degas would destroy his wax masterpieces so he could have the pleasure, as he put it, of starting them again. In his last years, Degas was almost completely blind. He died 27 September 1917. Among the group of several friends who came to accompany him to Montmartre cemetery there was only one Impressionist: Claude Monet. The other friend who had survived him, Renoir, was confined to an invalid's armchair. In the midst of the First World War, the painter's death went almost unnoticed.

Around the time the notorious 1863 Salon des Refusés signalled the clear distinction in French painting between a revolutionary avant-garde and the conservative establishment, Edgar Degas painted a self-portrait which could hardly have looked less like that of a potential revolutionary. He appears a perfect middle-class gentleman or, as the Cubist painter André Lhote put it, like 'a disastrously incorruptible accountant'. Wearing the funereal uniform of the 19th-century male bourgeois which, in the words of Baudelaire, made them look like 'an immense cortège of undertakers' muted', Degas politely doffs his top hat and guardedly returns the scrutiny of the viewer. A photograph taken a few years earlier, preserved in the French National Library, shows him looking very much the same, although his posture is more tense and awkward than in the painting.

The Degas in the photo holds his top hat over his genital area in a gesture unconsciously reminiscent of that of the male peasant in Jean-François Millet's *Angelus*. Salvador Dalí's provocative explanation of the peasant's uncomfortable stance was that he was attempting to hide a burgeoning erection. Degas' sheepish and self-conscious expression also suggests an element of sexual modesty. For an artist who once said that he wanted to be both 'illustrious and unknown', any speculation about his sexuality would have seemed to him an unpardonable and irrelevant impertinence.

Nevertheless, the peculiar nature of much of Degas' subject matter, the stance of unrelenting misogyny he adopted, and the very lack of concrete clues about his personal relationships have fuelled such speculation from the beginning. As early as 1869 Manet confided to the Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, with whom Degas was conducting a bizarre and somewhat unconvincing flirtation, 'He isn't capable of loving a woman, much less of telling her that he does or of doing anything about it.' In the same year, Morisot wryly described in a letter to her sister how Degas 'came and sat beside me, pretending to court me – but this courting was confined to a long commentary on Solomon's proverb, 'Woman is the desolation of the righteous'...'.

Rumours of a sexual or emotional involvement with another gifted female painter, the American Mary Cassatt, can also be fairly discounted with confidence, although the fact that Cassatt burnt Degas' letters to her might suggest that there was something that she wished to hide. Degas' failure to form a serious relationship with any member of the opposite sex has been attributed to a variety of causes, such as the death of his mother

Orchestra Musicians, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 69 x 49 cm.
Städel-Museum, Frankfurt.

when he was at the sensitive age of thirteen, an early rejection in love, and impotence resulting from a venereal infection. This last theory is based on a jocular conversation between Degas and a model towards the end of his life and need not be taken too seriously.

In 1858, Degas formed an intense and sentimental friendship with the painter Gustave Moreau. The emotional tone of Degas' letters to the older artist might suggest to modern eyes an element of homosexuality in their relationship. 'I am really sending this to you to help me wait for your return more patiently, whilst hoping for a letter from you ... I do hope you will not put off your return. You promised that you would spend no more than two months in Venice and Milan.'

But whereas Moreau's paintings exude an air of latent or even overt homosexuality, the same cannot be said of Degas'. There are accounts of Degas chatting in mellow and contented moods with models and dancers towards the end of his life, but it seems likely that, in common with many 19th-century middle-class men, he was afraid of and found it hard to relate to women of his own class. His more outrageously misogynistic pronouncements convey a strong sense of his fear.

'What frightens me more than anything else in the world is taking tea in a fashionable tea-room. You might well imagine you were in a hen-house. Why must women take all that trouble to look so ugly and be so vulgar?' or 'Oh! Women can never forgive me. They hate me. They can feel that I leave them defenceless. I show them without their coquetry, as no more than brute animals cleaning themselves! ... They see me as their enemy – fortunately, for if they did like me, that would be the end of me!'

Degas' portraits of middle-class women have faces, unlike his dancers, prostitutes, laundresses, milliners, and bathers who are usually stereotyped or quite literally faceless. On the other hand, these middle-class women may seem intelligent, rational, and sensitive, but are nevertheless a grim lot, without warmth or sensuality. Many of Degas' female relatives seem to be overwhelmed by frigid and loveless melancholy. His nieces Giovanna and Giulia Bellelli turn from one another without the slightest trace of sisterly intimacy or affection. Grimmiest of all is the portrait of his aunt, the Duchess of Montejasi Cicerale, and her two daughters in which the implacable old woman seems to be separated from her offspring by an unbridgeable physical and psychological gulf.

The theme of tension and hostility between the sexes underlies many of Degas' most ambitious works of the 1860s, both in genre-like depictions of modern life such as *Pouting* and *Interior* (pp. 18-19) (formerly known as *The Rape* and probably inspired by Émile Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin*) and in elaborate historical scenes such as *Young Spartans Exercising* (p. 8) and *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* (pp. 10-11). This last – the most lurid and sensational picture Degas ever painted – shows horsemen shooting arrows at a group of nude women. The women's bodies show no wounds or blood, but fall in poses suggestive more of erotic frenzy than of the agony of death. From the time that Degas reached maturity as an

A Woman Ironing, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 39.4 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.





artist in the 1870s, most of his depictions of women – apart from a few middle-class portraits – include more than a suggestion that the women are prostitutes. Prostitution in 19th-century Paris took a wide variety of forms, from the bedraggled street-walker desperate for a meal to the ‘Grande Horizontale’ able to charge a fortune for her favours. Virtually any woman who had to go out to work and earn a living was regarded as also liable to sell her body. So it was that Degas’ depictions of singers, dancers, circus performers, and even milliners and laundresses could have disreputable connotations for his contemporaries that might not always be apparent today.

It was during the Second Empire (from 1852 to 1871) that Paris consolidated its reputation as the pleasure capital of Europe. That ‘love for sale’ was one of the chief attractions of Paris for foreign visitors is made abundantly clear by the operetta *La Vie Parisienne* composed by Jacques Offenbach for the 1867 Paris World Exhibition. The libretto, written by Degas’ close friend Ludovic Halévy and his collaborator Henri Meilhac, shamelessly celebrates Paris’ reputation as ‘the modern Babylon’ and a great focus for venal love.

Amongst the characters are a ‘Grande Horizontale’ with the outrageously punning name of Métella (roughly translatable as ‘put it in’), a pretty glove-maker called Gabrielle who might have stepped from one of Degas’ pastels of milliners, a Brazilian millionaire who wants to lose his fortune to Parisian ‘hussies’, a Swedish Baroness who longs to hear the singer Thérèse and her husband who wants to experience and enjoy everything at once *jusque-là* (to the fullest),

Prostitution was a major theme of French writers and artists throughout the second half of the 19th century. Literary interest in prostitution peaked around 1880. Edmond de Goncourt published *La Fille Elisa* in 1877, and Émile Zola, *Nana* in 1879-1880. Guy de Maupassant made his reputation with *Boule de Suif* in 1880 and followed it up the next year with the endearing *La Maison Tellier*. Degas’ references to the Parisian traffic in female flesh were often scrupulously discreet – a glimpse of a gentleman’s black trousers amongst the scenery of the opera, or of the gaudy plumage of a courtesan’s hat at the race-course as her carriage passes from view. Sometimes it is no more than a pervasively suggestive atmosphere that would nonetheless have been quite perceptible to men of Degas’ class and tastes.

This murky world of female commerce, in which predatory top-hat wearing males indulged, is illuminated in a fascinating, if somewhat lurid, way by two anonymous Parisian publications of the 1880s, when Degas was at the height of his career. *Ces Demoiselles de l’Opéra*, published in 1887 and attributed to *Vieil abonné* (‘a long-time season-ticket-holder’), offers a survey of all the female dancers that were active at the new Paris Opera and looks back nostalgically to the 1860s when Degas also began to interest himself in ballet at the old house in the rue Le Peletier.

The tone of the book is gossipy and mildly lecherous. The *Vieil abonné* seems more interested in the physical attractions of the dancers and in the racy details of their private lives

The Dance Class, c. 1873-1876.
Oil on canvas, 85.5 x 75 cm.
Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

than he is in the finer points of their dancing techniques. Mlle Eugénie Fiocre, the only female dancer described in the book and identifiably painted by Degas, is said to have 'a nose for which an umbrella would be useful' – Degas' study of her shows that she had a rather turned up and exceptionally pretty nose – 'but what a figure! One should go down on one's knees in front of it – and behind!'

Ces Demoiselles de l'Opéra vividly conveys the flavour of the flirtatious conversations that Degas enjoyed with his young dancer models. Daniel Halévy, the son of Degas' old friend Ludovic, noted that when Degas was with dancers he 'finds them all charming, makes excuses for anything they do, and laughs at everything they say'.

The *Vieil abonné* recorded the foibles, the remarks, and the little habits of the dancers with the same affectionate indulgence. So we hear, for example, that the only distinguishing characteristic of Léontine Beaugrand was an inordinate love of chocolates, and how *la petite* Paillier was outraged when complimented by an admirer as looking like a Boucher, thinking that he was comparing her with a butcher. *The Pretty Women of Paris* was published in English in 1883, and describes itself on the title page as a 'Complete Directory and Guide to Pleasure for Visitors to the City of Gaiety'.

The information offered about Parisian women is so comprehensive and so detailed that it cannot possibly have been compiled by one man. The tone throughout, though, is consistent – scurrilous and often misogynistic. It gives the reader the impression of coming face to face with all the anonymous and faceless women we find in Degas' oeuvre, from star dancers to milliners and laundresses.

On the first page we encounter Ellen Andrée, who modelled for Degas' *The Absinthe Drinker* (p. 41). She is a very pretty fair woman, whose artistic talents are small, although her body is in splendid proportion for such a tiny creature. Her principal lovers count amongst the artists of the capital, for whom she has often posed as model. She has been photographed in many poses, always without any clothing, and these studies from life could have been purchased all over Paris for a small sum. She is very straightforward and kind-hearted, but cannot write or read easily, her education having been greatly neglected. She is about twenty-four years old.

It seems that the authors underestimated her age, her intelligence, and her dramatic talents. She is unlikely to have been sixteen when she posed as the weary prostitute in Degas' *The Absinthe Drinker* in 1876, she clearly had the wit to hold her own among the rip-roaring company of Degas and his friends at the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in the 1870s, and she went on to enjoy a long and distinguished career in the theatre.

On later pages of this 'Directory and Guide', we meet Thérèse Bréval, who 'was a ballet-girl for a time, but soon grew tired of kicking up her legs for such small wages'; Marie Folliot, 'formerly an assistant in a milliner's shop, but her beauty singled her out for the advances of the seducer...'; Blanche de Labarre, employed in the corset department of a large store

*Dancer Standing, her Hands Crossed
Behind her Back, 1873.*
Black and white chalk on mounted grey
paper, 45 x 29.7 cm.
Private collection.





where 'the habit of continually taking off and trying on so many corsets seems to have had an effect on her morals and made her ever afterwards only too ready to unlace her own...'; Amélie Latour, 'a simple laundress', who 'used to carry washing home to the customers, who, in return for the clean linen she brought, would often rumple her chemise and petticoats'; the circus performer Oceana, 'a female acrobat turning double somersaults without a stitch on is a splendid sight for a tired old rake...'; Countess Letischeff, who 'began to frequent all the race-meetings round Paris'; and Glady and Marie Magnier, who both began life like Henri Murger's Mimi by making artificial flowers.

Degas' most direct and explicit depictions of prostitution date from the late 1870s and constitute a series of monotype prints of brothels, which are exceptional in his oeuvre in a number of ways. By the time Degas came to produce these images, the Parisian brothel was already in decline and represented a somewhat old-fashioned way for the middle-class gentleman to take his pleasure.

The Pretty Women of Paris lists ninety-nine brothels within central Paris and a further seven in the suburbs. The 183 women described individually in the book all worked independently of brothels, however. Fanny Robert, for example, started her career in a brothel in Marseilles, but was 'rescued and brought to Paris by a rich lecher'. 'The women loll around on the plushly-upholstered furniture in relaxed open-legged postures, comfortable in their nudity or semi-nudity and in their proximity to one another.' The life of a registered prostitute in a licensed brothel must have been a tough one.

Apart from the drudgery of the work, the women were subject to regular medical inspections and other petty and humiliating restrictions. Yet – as described in the fiction of the period and 'realist' cabaret songs – life in a brothel was not without its compensations and attractions. The song *En Maison*, sung by Damia, dubbed *la Tragédienne de la chanson*, tells of a young girl who is rescued from a brothel by marriage to a middle-class man, but who comes to miss the freedoms and the little habits of her life in the whorehouse. Degas' prostitutes do not look oppressed or unhappy. These brothel scenes are the most exuberant images he produced and have an earthy humour and a *joie-de-vivre* not found elsewhere in his work. By contrast, it is the black-clad women of Degas' portraits with their rigid body language who seem repressed and oppressed.

The good-humoured and warm-hearted behaviour of the women in the brothel prints anticipates the mood of Guy de Maupassant's famous short story *The House of Madame Tellier*, published in 1881, in which the prostitutes lavish their warmth and affection on a young girl taking her first communion. 'All the women were eager to fondle her, seeking an outlet for those affectionate demonstrations, that habit of caressing induced by their profession, which had impelled them to kiss the ducks in the railway carriage.'

Among the most delightful of the prints is *The Name Day of the Madame*, which Degas later reworked in pastel. A portly madame, dressed in respectable black and looking horribly like a

The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage,
c. 1874.
Pastel over brush and ink drawing on
cream paper, mounted on canvas,
54.3 x 73 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.

caricature of the *Widow of Windsor* (Queen Victoria), is surrounded by girls wearing only shoes and lavender stockings who offer her bouquets of flowers.

Once again we are reminded of *La Maison Tellier*, in which the women of the house 'threw their arms round Madame Tellier and hugged her, as if she was an indulgent mother overflowing with kindness and good will'. The stocky women depicted in these monotype prints belong to a different physical type – almost, it would seem, to a different species – from the statuesque laundresses, the more slender dancers and the tightly-corseted middle-class ladies. This sturdily thickset type was clearly heavily in demand by 19th-century clients of prostitutes. The adjective 'stout' is used with great approbation throughout *The Pretty Women of Paris*.

Many of the women are described in terms strongly reminiscent of Degas' images. Marie Kolb is 'a pleasant, little ball of fat', and Blanche Querette 'a most lascivious dumpling, and every bit of her fleshy frame is deserving of worship'. Berthe Laetitia is 'short, and her well-rounded form is developed to the utmost, all her bones being covered with firm layers of elastic flesh, and her breasts and buttocks being sights to behold'. Marie Martin is 'a fine, dark, Spanish-looking, matronly woman, with semi-globes like a Dutch sailor's wench, and a pair of hips and a monumental backside that would make a Turk go off like a bottle of ginger-beer on a hot day'. Berthe Mallet is 'the very woman for a man who likes to wallow in a mass of white flesh...'. Several of these prints, as well as many of the later pastel and oil *Toilettes*, show Degas' fascination with large and fleshy buttocks. Here, too, he shared tastes with the compilers of *The Pretty Women of Paris*, who were enthusiastic about the 'enormous, fascinating buttocks' of Ernestine Desclauzes.

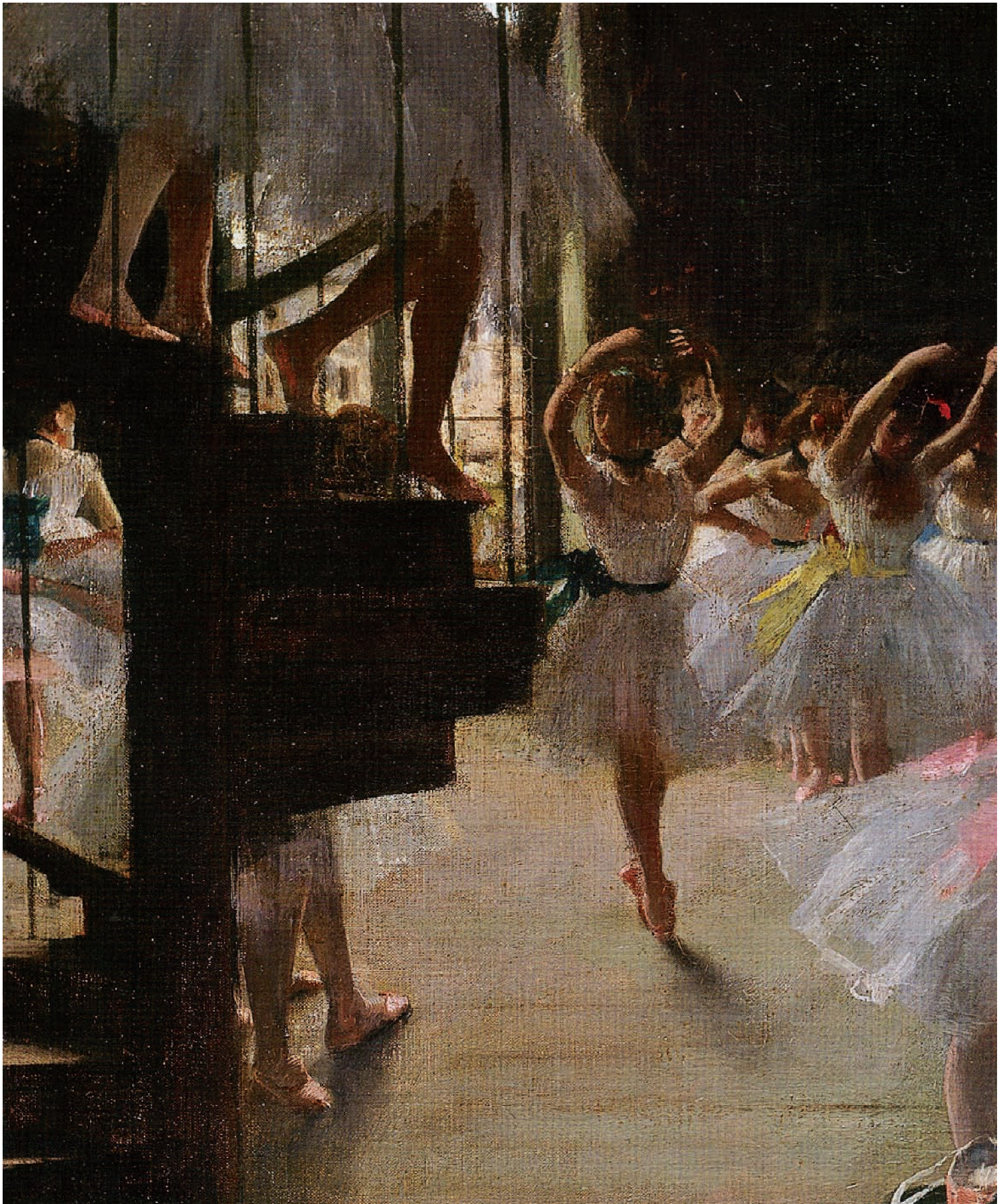
As for Zulmar Bouffar, the brilliant operetta star who created the role of the pretty glove-maker Gabrielle in Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*, they tell us that 'her best parts are her posterior beauties: even the Hottentot Venus cannot boast such a well-formed pair of sculptured marble buttocks'.

The residents of Degas' brothels differ from the bland, idealised nudes exhibited at the Paris Salons not only in their physical proportions and facial types, but also in their frank display of abundant pubic hair. Nowhere is the sexual schizophrenia of the 19th century more apparent than in the contrast between the hairless perfection of 19th-century academic nudes and the relish with which the pubic hair of the women in *The Pretty Women of Paris* is itemised in the most minute and precise detail.

So we learn that Bacri 'can boast the best bush that ever grew below a moll's navel'; that the *mons veneris* of Laure Decroze 'is protected by a splendid, soft, curly chestnut bush'; 'The neat body and flowing locks of golden hue' of Emilie Kessler 'will be sure to excite desire in the male, especially when he makes the discovery that her tangled bush is as black as night, affording a rare and pleasing contrast.' The brothel prints display a caricature and gently satirical element that is virtually unique in Degas' work. This is most apparent in Degas' mockery

The Dance Class, c. 1873.
Oil on canvas, 47.6 x 62.2 cm.
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington,
D.C.





of the bashful bowler- or top-hat wearing clients, dressed as always in the black uniform of the 'undertaker's mutes'.

In *The Serious Client*, for example, a curvaceous prostitute (whose body is modelled almost entirely in Degas' fingerprints) reaches out to encourage the timid bowler-wearing client. In several of these images, the notorious acerbity and terseness of Degas' conversational wit finds a nice visual equivalent in the oblique and abbreviated way that he refers to the presence or approach of the male client.

In the Salon shows a black-suited client with a top hat and stiffly-starched shirt collar entering a room filled with prostitutes disporting themselves in the most carelessly abandoned poses. In *Repose* and *The Customer*, we see no more than the client's nose and a narrow strip of the black fabric of his trousers. One of the most voluptuous of the brothel monotype prints, *Two Women (Scene in a Brothel)*, combines two potent male fantasies: lesbianism and interracial sex.

If we are to believe the authors of *The Pretty Women of Paris*, lesbianism, or 'tribadism' as they so quaintly put it, was common practice amongst Parisian prostitutes, although its extent may well have become exaggerated in their overheated imaginations. These lesbian encounters are described in the book with that curious mixture of moral disapproval and salivating prurience that still characterises attitudes to sex in much of the British popular press.

So we read of the 'disgusting caresses' common to French prostitutes and the 'Sapphic ties, of which Parisian unfortunates are generally so fond', and of Janvier, 'an insatiable devotee of lesbian love', who 'pursues her prey in the corridors of the Opera like a man', of Nina Melcy, mistress of a British Member of Parliament, who 'adores her own sex, but only when there is an important debate in the House', and of Juliette Grandville who is 'often Sappho by day and Messalina by night, rushing eagerly to the arms of her masculine adorer with the glorious traces of some girlish victim's excitement on her feverish ruby lips.' To see lesbian activity was clearly exciting to many men in 19th-century Paris.

We are told of Thérèse Bréval, that 'a favourite after-supper diversion is the spectacle of Thérèse making love to one of her own sex'. Still closer to Degas' print is the description of the love-making of Laure Heymann with the black Countess Mimi Pegère: 'It is a glorious sight to see the fair Laure locked in the serpentine embrace of the lecherous little Sappho, who is as black as coal, being a native of Haiti.' In its listing of the licensed brothels of Paris, *The Pretty Women of Paris* describes the brothel at 12 rue de Charbanais as 'The finest *bagnio* in the world. Each room is decorated in a different style, regardless of expense ... A negress is kept on the establishment. This is a favourite resort of the upper ten, and many ladies, both in society and out of it, come here alone, or with their lovers, for lesbian diversions.' The monotype prints of brothels are among the most private and personal of Degas' works. It was rare for him to treat the theme of prostitution as directly and openly in his larger-scale and more public works.

The Dance Class (detail), c. 1873.
Oil on canvas, 47.6 x 62.2 cm.
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington,
D.C.

An exception, though, was *Women on a Café Terrace, Evening* (p. 69), which Degas showed at the Third Impressionist Exhibition in 1877. Like *The Name Day of the Madame*, it is executed in pastel on top of a monotype print, but on a considerably larger scale. It shows gaudily-plumed and fashionably-dressed prostitutes going about their business of attracting passers-by on a busy gas-lit boulevard.

These women could easily be the sisters de Lamothe described in *The Pretty Women of Paris* as looking 'extremely attractive' by gaslight and as 'assiduous frequenters of the fashionable cafés of the Boulevard each night'. At the approach of winter they 'pack up their bidets for Nice, where they astound all beholders with their ultra-fashionable clothing and commanding appearance'. The top-hat wearing, dark-suited gentleman disappearing hurriedly to the right is evidently a potential customer. The woman to the left, rising from her seat, but shown bisected by a column, may be responding to his furtive invitation. Most striking of all is the prostitute in the centre, who raises her thumb to her teeth in an insolent and provocative gesture that has been much commented upon and variously interpreted. We know from Guy de Maupassant's short story *Playing With Fire* – about a respectable woman who catches the attention of a passing male from her balcony, with disastrous consequences – that an almost imperceptible gesture in the street was all that was needed to strike a sexual bargain.

From the brothel to the opera house was not such a great leap, if we are to believe the authors of *The Pretty Women of Paris*. 'All the women at the National Academy of Music are venal whores, and to outline their biographies would necessitate a volume devoted to that building alone, which is nothing more than a gigantic bawdy-house. From the apprentice ballet-girl, just out of her teens, down to the high-salaried principal songstress, all are to be had for the asking – the payment varying from a supper and a new pair of boots, to hundreds of pounds.'

With a view softened somewhat by nostalgia, the *Vieil abonné* also evokes the sexually-charged atmosphere of the old opera house in the rue Le Peletier. 'Then, pushing through the lobby door which led onto the stairs of the wings, spreading up these staircases – trotting, chirping, humming, laughing, opening love-letters, breathing in bouquets of flowers, nibbling sweets or apples – [went] the entire flight of these charming creatures, the loves and the pleasure of Paris at that time, who were the light, the animation, the life, the joy of the poor old building...'

In the last thirty years of the 19th century when Degas painted and drew his images of dancers, ballet was going through an artistic trough and was far from the respected and elevated art form it had been since the time of Diaghilev. After visiting Degas in his studio in 1874, the writer Edmond de Goncourt noted in his diary that Degas was able to demonstrate various balletic positions. The sight of the conservative and already rather middle-aged Degas performing pirouettes in his studio must have been a strange one.

The Absinthe Drinker or Glass of Absinthe, 1875-1876.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 68.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





However, it seems likely that it was not so much the techniques of dancing that fascinated Degas as the louche atmosphere backstage. Degas rarely depicted an actual performance, and when he did, the illusion is always compromised by some intrusive element of banal reality, such as the top of a musical instrument that rises up from the orchestra pit or a glimpse of the dark trousers of the star dancer's 'protector' standing in the wings. Although the atmosphere of the backstage traffic in flesh is all-pervasive, it is once again only in the more private medium of the monotype print that Degas gives it more explicit expression. In the late 1870s, around the time that Degas produced his brothel prints, he used the same medium for a series of sharp and witty illustrations to the stories written by Ludovic Halévy about the Cardinal family: two young dancers at the Opera, Pauline and Virginie, and their parents M. and Mme Cardinal, who nurture their daughters' dancing and amorous careers.

Halévy, who, today, is chiefly remembered as co-librettist (with Henri Meilhac) of Offenbach's wittiest operettas, and of Bizet's *Carmen*, which first introduced to the operatic stage the kind of working-class girls that fascinated Degas, achieved an enormous popular success in France between 1870 and 1880 with his stories about the Cardinal family. In *Ces Demoiselles de l'Opéra*, the *Vieil abonné* acknowledges the truthfulness of Halévy's portrayal of the unscrupulous mothers' jealousy guarding their daughters' virginities only to auction them off in due course to the highest bidder.

As well as the 'high' art forms of opera and ballet (however debased), Degas greatly enjoyed the popular art form of the Café Concert, which reached its peak in the 1870s. In works towards the end of that decade such as *At the "Café des Ambassadeurs"* and *The Song of the Dog* (p. 58) (both executed in pastel on top of a monotype print), Degas vividly captures the animated gas-lit atmosphere of the Café Concerts, with the gaudily dressed prostitutes weaving their way through the crowds in search of customers.

According to *The Pretty Women of Paris*, not only did prostitutes find the floors of the Café Concerts rich hunting-grounds, but many took to the stage in order to increase their connections and display their charms. Perrine, for example, 'graces the music-hall stage with her presence, but only for the purposes of prostitution, for she has but a piping, shrill little voice.' *The Song of the Dog* shows the most famous café concert star of the time, Thérèse.

Degas enthused about her. 'She opens her mouth and out comes the largest and yet the most delicate, the most wittily tender voice there is.' Earning a reputed 30,000 francs a year and the owner of a magnificent house at Asnières, Thérèse had no financial need for prostitution but, in the words of *The Pretty Women of Paris*, 'Thérèse is occasionally sought after by rich strangers, who spend a few hours with her out of curiosity'. We are also informed that 'the curse of her life has been her voracious appetite for active tribadism' and that 'if the rakes who seek the enjoyment of her body bring a fresh-looking girl with them as a sacrifice to the insatiable Sappho, they will not be asked for a fee...'.

Women Combing their Hair, 1875-1876.
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas,
32.4 x 46 cm.
The Phillips Collection, Washington,
D.C.

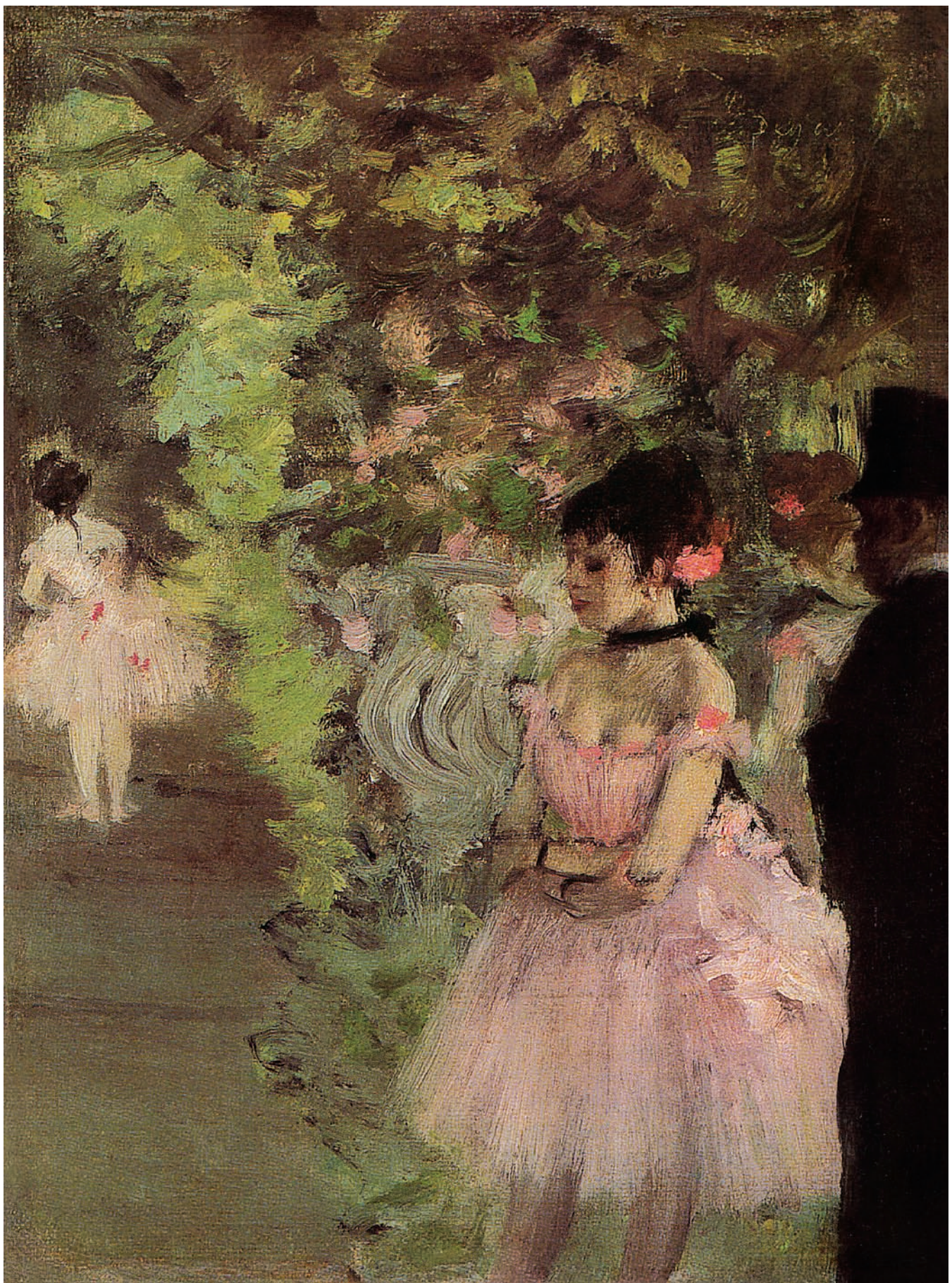
In the 1880s, Degas began the splendid series of *Toilettes* – women washing and drying themselves and combing their hair – which constitutes one of his greatest achievements. These *Toilettes* mark a significant break with the Post-Renaissance tradition of depicting the female nude as a glorified pin-up self-consciously displaying her charms for the benefit of the male viewer.

As Degas explained to the Irish writer George Moore, 'Until now the nude has always been represented in poses which presuppose an audience, but these women of mine are honest, simple folk, involved solely and entirely in what they are doing. Here is an individual person; she is washing her feet. It is as if you were looking through a keyhole.' In none of these *Toilettes* does Degas individualise the facial features of his models. Faces are either hidden or blurred and indiscernible. Degas' subject is 'woman' rather than particular women. He observes her behaviour with the pseudo-objectivity of a scientist studying a primitive tribe or another species. Such an attitude seems disconcerting in today's moral and political climate. Degas himself remarked 'I have perhaps too often perceived woman as an animal'.

Another reason for Degas' avoidance of his models' faces may have been his disgust for the slick and salacious female nudes on show at the Paris Salons. The obscenity of those pictures lay not so much in the nudity as in the coyly enticing facial expressions. There were those who regarded Degas' *Toilettes* as an attack on womanhood and a denial of sensuality. Even Joris Karl Huysmans, who greatly admired Degas' work, took this view, claiming that Degas had 'in the face of his own century flung the grossest insult by overthrowing woman, the idol who has always been so gently treated, whom he degrades by showing her naked in the bathtub and in the humiliating dispositions of her private toilet'. For Huysmans, Degas gloried in 'his disdain for the flesh as no artist has ventured to do since the Middle Ages ...'.

Far from disdaining flesh, many of these *Toilettes* express a powerful if sublimated eroticism. Both colour and line become increasingly charged with sensuality as the series progresses. The rituals of washing can be erotically charged, as we see from *The Pretty Women of Paris*, in which the personal hygiene of the women is described in enthusiastic detail. Clara Dermigny would offer her customers erotic books to read 'while she is getting ready for them by performing the preliminary ablutions', and Elina Denizane was nicknamed Fleur-de-Bidet 'because she is always astride that useful article of furniture, which plays such an important part in the *toilette* of a Frenchwoman'. It is no coincidence that the theme of the *Toilette* was first touched upon in the series of monotype prints devoted to the brothel in the late 1870s. In *Admiration*, the voyeurism is made comically explicit by the appearance of a portly middle-aged man who seems to crawl up from underneath the bathtub. In another print from the series, a dark-suited gentleman quietly watches a nude woman combing her hair. There is an oblique hint of 'preliminary ablutions' in works such

Dancers Backstage, 1876/1883.
Oil on canvas, 24.2 x 18.8 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
D.C.





as *The Morning Bath* (p. 119) in the Institute of Art in Chicago, or *The Bath* (p. 158) in the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, in which a bed is placed prominently in the foreground. In both cases the viewer would seem to be watching from the bed itself, although the ablutions could perhaps be more accurately described as post-coital rather than preliminary, for the beds are already rumpled.

Amongst the most voluptuous of Degas' nudes are those combing their hair. Degas was fascinated by women's hair. There are stories of him happily combing the hair of his models for hours on end. In one of the odder episodes of his career, he alarmed the family of his friend Ludovic Halévy by writing a formal letter to request permission to see Geneviève Halévy (widow of the composer Georges Bizet) with her hair down. Such hair fetishism was common in many late 19th-century artists and writers. The novelist Elizabeth Gaskell remarked on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's fascination with women's hair, and described how when a woman with beautiful hair entered the room he was 'like the cat turned into a lady, who jumped out of bed and ran after a mouse'. Among the many other artists of the period who had some sort of fixation on women's hair were Münch, Mucha, and Toorop. The literature of the late 19th century also abounds in erotic images of women's hair. Pierre Louÿs' poem *Hair* (which inspired an exquisite song by Claude Debussy) expresses the claustrophobic sensuality of being enveloped in a woman's hair. Most famous of all is the scene in Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* in which Mélisande leans out of her bedroom and allows her abundant hair to fall over Pelléas standing beneath.

If Degas' art is permeated from beginning to end with overtones of prostitution, it remains nevertheless quite untainted by any element of sleaziness. In his famous series of essays inspired by the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire speculated on the often depressing and disappointing representations of erotic subjects and why this was the case. The defect of most, he thought, was 'a lack of sincerity and a naïvete'. But he believed it was possible to make great art out of such subject matter. 'All things are sanctified by genius, and if these themes were treated with the necessary care and reflection, they would in no way be soiled by that revolting obscenity which is bravado rather than truth.' It is precisely his 'naïve' truthfulness and the element of reflection that enable Degas to transmute base metal into purest gold. As Renoir remarked to the dealer Vollard apropos the monotype print of *The Name Day of the Madame* (p. xx), 'At first sight such a subject may often seem pornographic. Only someone like Degas could endow *The Name Day of the Madame* with an air of joyousness and with the grandeur of an Egyptian bas-relief.'

*The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer's
Opera "Robert Le Diable", 1876.
Oil on canvas, 76.6 x 81.3 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*



Laundress Carrying Linen in Town,
1876-1878.
Oil on canvas, 46 x 61 cm.
Paul J. Sachs Collection, New York.

LETTERS BY DEGAS





To Frølich

Degas Brothers, New Orleans

27 Nov. 1872

It is only today, November 2nd, that I receive your affectionate letter, my dear Frølich. These most accurate Americans had read Norwick Connecticut where in your handwriting New Orleans was written quite clearly. And so through their fault this good paper has travelled around a fortnight too long.

The ocean! How vast it is and how far I am from you. The *Scotia* in which I travelled is an English boat swift and sure. It brought us (I was with my brother René) in 10 days. The *Empire City* even takes 12 from Liverpool to New York. What a sad crossing. I did not know any English, I hardly know any more, and on English territory, even at sea, there is a coldness and a conventional distrust which you have perhaps already felt.

New York, great town and great port. The townsfolk know the great water. They even say that going to Europe is going to the other side of the water. New people. In America there is far more disregard of the English race than I had supposed.

Four days by train brought us here at last. Borrow an atlas from your dear little daughter and take a look at the distance. Well (I have certainly not the strength of Thor), I was fatter than on my departure. Air – there is nothing but air. How many new places I have seen, what plans that put into my head, my dear Frølich! Already I am giving them up, I want nothing but my own little corner where I shall dig assiduously. Art does not expand, it repeats itself. And, if you want comparisons at all costs, I may tell you that in order to produce good fruit one must line up on an espalier. One remains thus all ones life, arms extended, mouth open, so as to assimilate what is happening, what is around one and alive.

Have you read the *Confessions* by J. Jacques Rousseau? I am sure you have. Then do you recall his manner of describing, his wealth of humour, after he has retired to the île du Lac de St Pierre in Switzerland (it is towards the end) and that he is telling how he used to go out at daybreak, that whichever way he went, without noticing it, he examined everything, that he started on work that would take 10 years to finish and left it without regret at the end of 10 minutes? Well that is my case, exactly. Everything attracts me here. I look at everything, I shall even describe everything to you accurately when I get back. I like nothing better than the negresses of all shades, holding in their arms little white babies, so white, against white houses with columns of fluted wood and in gardens of orange trees and the ladies in muslin against the fronts of their little houses and the steamboats with two chimneys as tall as factory chimneys and the fruit vendors with their shops full to bursting, and the contrast between the lively hum and bustle of the offices with this immense black animal force, etc. etc. And the pretty women of pure blood and the pretty 25 year olds and the well set up negresses!

In this way I am accumulating plans which would take ten lifetimes to carry out. In six weeks time I shall drop them without regret in order to regain and never more to leave *my home*.

My dear friend, thank you a hundred times for your letters and for your friendship. That gives such pleasure when one is so far away.

My eyes are much better. I work little, to be sure, but at difficult things. The family portraits, they have to be done more or less to suit the family taste, by impossible lighting, very much disturbed, with models full of affection but a little sans-gêne and taking you far less seriously because you are their nephew or their cousin.



I have just messed up a large pastel and am somewhat mortified. If I have time I intend to bring back some crude little thing of my own but for myself, for my room. It is not good to do Parisian art and Louisiana art indiscriminately, it is liable to turn into the *Monde Illustré*. And then nothing but a really long stay can reveal the customs of a people, that is to say their charm. Instantaneousness is photography, nothing more.

Have you seen the Mr Schumaker whom you sent to me? He thought I should have been able to help him more easily. He wanted to be rubbed down by a French hand, like at the Turkish baths, immediately, after having sweated a little. I told him that it took time to sweat out our vices (well done?).

I shall probably be back in January. I shall travel via Havanna. But you, you will soon be leaving us you say? I do hope it is for your old mother's sake, in which case it is a duty. However we shall see a lot of each other until the spring. Your little daughter will play for me – I need music so much. There is no opera here this winter. Yesterday evening I went to a rather monotonous concert, the first of the year. A Madame Urto played the violin with some talent but rather monotonously accompanied and there is not the same intimacy at a concert, here especially where the applause is even more stupid than elsewhere.

Clotilde must have been delighted to spin you a yarn about the master's journey. I am sure she did not hide her satisfaction. She is a real servant out of a play, but she has her points. I threatened not to take her back on my return and I am afraid to do so. She is too young for a bachelor and her self-assurance is really of too strong a quality. You must still have your Swedish woman, she seems to be so devoted to you that you will not be able to part with her.

You only knew Achille, I believe, and only met him for a moment. My other brother, René, the last of the three boys, was my travelling companion, even my master. I knew neither English nor the art of travelling in America; therefore I obeyed him blindly. What stupidities I should have committed without him! He is married and his wife, our cousin, is blind, poor thing, almost without hope. She has borne him two children, she is going to give him a third whose Godfather I shall be, and as the widow of a young American killed in the war of Secession she already had a little girl of her own who is 9 years old. Achille and René are partners; I am writing to you on their office note-paper. They are earning very nicely and are really in an exceptionally good position for their age. They are much liked and respected here and I am quite proud of them.

Politics! I am trying to follow those of my native France in the Louisianian papers. They talk of little but the super tax on houses, and they give Mr Thiers experts' advice on republicanism.

Goodbye, your proverbs are nearly as abundant as those of Sancho; given his gaiety you would increase them threefold. How healthy a thing is laughter, I laughed at them a lot.

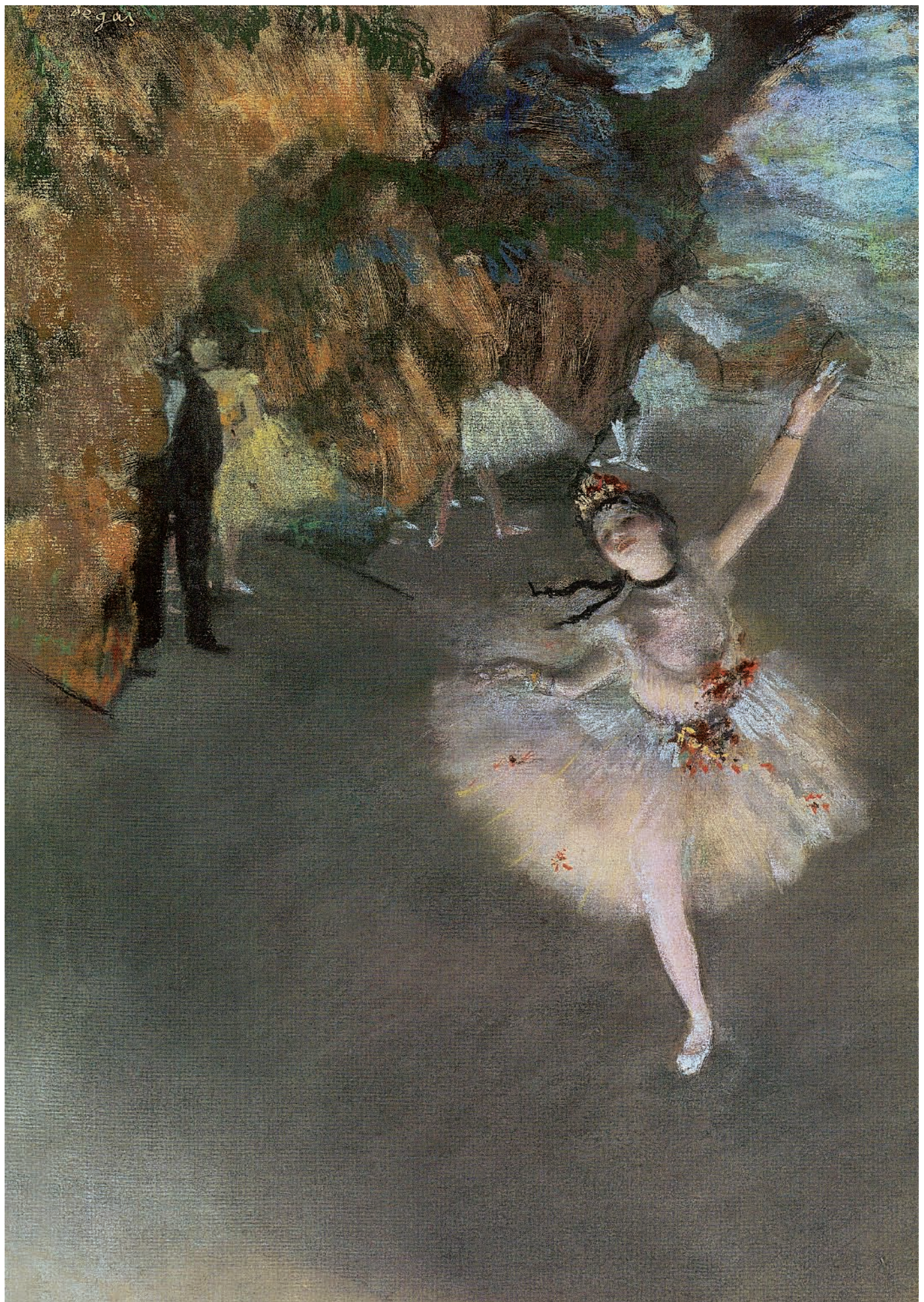
It is true, my dear Frölich, one feels young in spirit. That is what David said in Brussels on the eve of his death. But enthusiasm, good humour, and vision, one is bound to lose a little of these. You are in a better way than I am.

You can write to me when you get this; your answer will still find me at Louisiana. A kiss for your little one. I clasp your hand and thank you for your friendship.

Degas

My regards to Manet and his family.

I have reread my letter. It is very cold compared to yours. Do not be angry with me.







To Henri Rouart

New Orleans

5 Dec. 1872

You will receive this, my dear Rouart, on New Years Day. You will then wish Mme Rouart a happy New Year and embrace your children for me, including the newborn. Out of this you will also take a bit for yourself.

I shall certainly be back in January. To vary my journey I intend going back via Havanna, the French transatlantic lines dock there. I am eager to see you again at my house, to work in contact with you. One does nothing here, it lies in the climate, nothing but cotton, one lives for cotton and from cotton. The light is so strong that I have not yet been able to do anything on the river. My eyes are so greatly in need of care that I scarcely take any risk with them at all. A few family portraits will be the sum total of my efforts, I was unable to avoid that and assuredly would not wish to complain if it were less difficult, if the settings were less insipid and the models less restless. Oh well, it will be a journey I have done and very little else. Manet would see lovely things here, even more than I do. He would not make any more of them. One loves and gives art only to the things to which one is accustomed. New things capture your fancy and bore you by turns. The beautiful, refined Indian women behind their half opened green shutters, and the old women with their big bandanna kerchiefs going to the market can be seen in a different light to Biard. But then what? The orange gardens and the painted houses attract attention, too, and the children all dressed in white and all white against black arms, they are also beautiful. But wait! Do you remember in the Confessions, towards the end, Rousseau on the île de St Pierre on the Lac de Brienne, at last free to dream in peace, observing impartially, beginning work that would take 10 years to finish and abandoning it after 10 minutes without regret? That is exactly how I feel. I see many things here, I admire them. I make a mental note of their appropriation and expression and I shall leave it all without regret. Life is too short and the strength one has only just suffices. Well then, long live fine laundering in France.

I have had a slight attack of dysentery for the last two, which is making me tired. The bismuth nitrate will stop that. We also have hot temperatures in December, more suited to June, 24 or 25 degrees Celsius at least, not forgetting a sirocco wind that could kill you. This weather would be unbearable in summer, and exhausting during other seasons. You would have to be from the country, or work for the eternal cotton industry, for it not to affect you.

Fifteen days ago, ML Bujac had dinner with us. Naturally we spoke about you, and all the good things that were said did not surprise anybody. He seems very sad and worried, poor man! And he has the right to be. One day I will go to the ice factory with him.

So, you are hardly a better writer than me. Why haven't you written me even two words? In the morning, when the mail arrives, there are rarely any letters for me, and I am still not used to it.

You see my friend, I am at home living the good life like no other, except maybe Bouguereau, whose energy and technique I cannot match. I am craving some order. I am not even considering a woman as an enemy of this new way of being. Some children, my own and from me, would this be too much? No. I am dreaming of something done well, a well-ordered whole (Poussin style) and Corot's great age. It is the right moment. Same way of living, but less happy, less honorable, and full of all regrets.



Here René is among family, he is only a little homesick. His wife is blind but she has overcome this unhappiness. They are expecting a third child, to whom I will be the godfather and who will not bear my foolish behaviour. But this is a secret, don't tell anybody; nobody is being told. I have not even written to my sister, that's the order. Father wants the world to end as if we were not there to restore order.

The lack of opera is a real suffering. We would have rented her a ground-floor box, where she would never have missed a performance, apart from during the delivery, of course. Instead, we have a comedy, drama, vaudeville troupe, etc, where there are a lot of very good talents from Montmartre.

Here nearly every woman is pretty, and many have a touch of ugliness which adds to their charm. But I fear their minds are as weak as mine, two of us would make for a poorly managed household. Alas, I just said something which would bring me nothing but an awful reputation. Swear, Rouart, on your word, to never repeat it in case it could be reported here, to people from here or people who know people from here, that I told you women from New-Orleans are weak-minded. This is serious – let us not jest. My death would not counter such an affront. Louisiana must be respected by all her children; I too am nearly one of them. After that, if I were to tell you that they must be good, the insult would be too much, and in repeating that, you would have brought me to my executioners. I am joking; creole women have something captivating. I was telling you about Rousseau earlier, I am reading him again tonight and like to quote him.

Julie d'Étange was loved because she seemed ready to be loved (read again a letter from Claire to her friend); there is an 18th century tenderness in their appearance. In these families, many arrived here young, and you can still smell the perfume.

Farewell, I wanted to fill four pages, notice that I wanted to please you. If I have not succeeded, punish me in the same way. And I am in De Gas Brothers office, where we write a lot. De Gas Brothers are well-respected here and I am quite honoured to see that. They will succeed.

Finally, again I wish a happy New Year to Mrs Rouart, kiss again your children and shake your hand.

Yours faithfully,
Degas

Greetings to Levert, your friends, Martin, Pissarro with who I will speak a lot from here, etc. I was forgetting your brother and Mignon.

Here lives a man called Lamon who invented a said-to be clever device, which makes carts work with steam in the upper town. We were talking a lot about tramways in Paris, I will bring you back a description of this tool.







To Henri Rouart

Paris
8 Aug. 1873

You could not do better, my dear friend, than to sing of the countryside. If your unusual correspondent has not quite burnt down the Opera he has at least rented two rooms ... at Croissy. He is going to go there once he has secured his rest and he will do his nature cure just like any strolling player. He is considering walking to Rouen, along the banks of the Seine, of boarding pinnacles or a train if it happens to pass. So I rather fancy myself a stick in one hand but no parasol, studying values, the curves in the road, on little hills, and above all in the evenings, the hour for soup and of great sleepiness in sheets that are comparatively white. A little whiff of the kitchen and the Roche-Guyon, that is my device. It is *nature*. I am expecting less delirious happiness from it than you, but just a little good for my eyes and a little relaxation for the rest of me.

I have never done with the finishing off of my pictures and pastels etc. How long it is and how my last good years are passing in mediocrity! I often weep over my poor life. Yesterday I went to the funeral of Tillot's father. Lippmann told me the other day that you would soon be back and I had some small hope of seeing you there. I am writing to you in order to reduce the force of your reproaches. Perhaps the letter will come back from Portrieux to Paris but it will reach you and perhaps appease you. The heart is like many an instrument, it must be rubbed up and used a lot so that it keeps bright and well. For my own, it is rather you who rub it than its owner.



To Faureii

Turin
Saturday, Dec. 1873

Dear Mr Faure,

This is where an ill wind has cast me at Turin. My father was en route for Naples, he fell ill here and left us without any news of himself and when we found him at last it was I who had to leave immediately to look after him and I find myself tied for some time to come, far from my painting and my life, in the heart of Piemont.

I was eager to finish your picture and to do your bagatelle. Stevens was waiting for his two pictures. I wrote to him yesterday, I am writing to you today to ask forgiveness from both of you.

Well, here we both are far removed from our own theatres. Even if mine did not burn down it is just as if it had. I act no more.

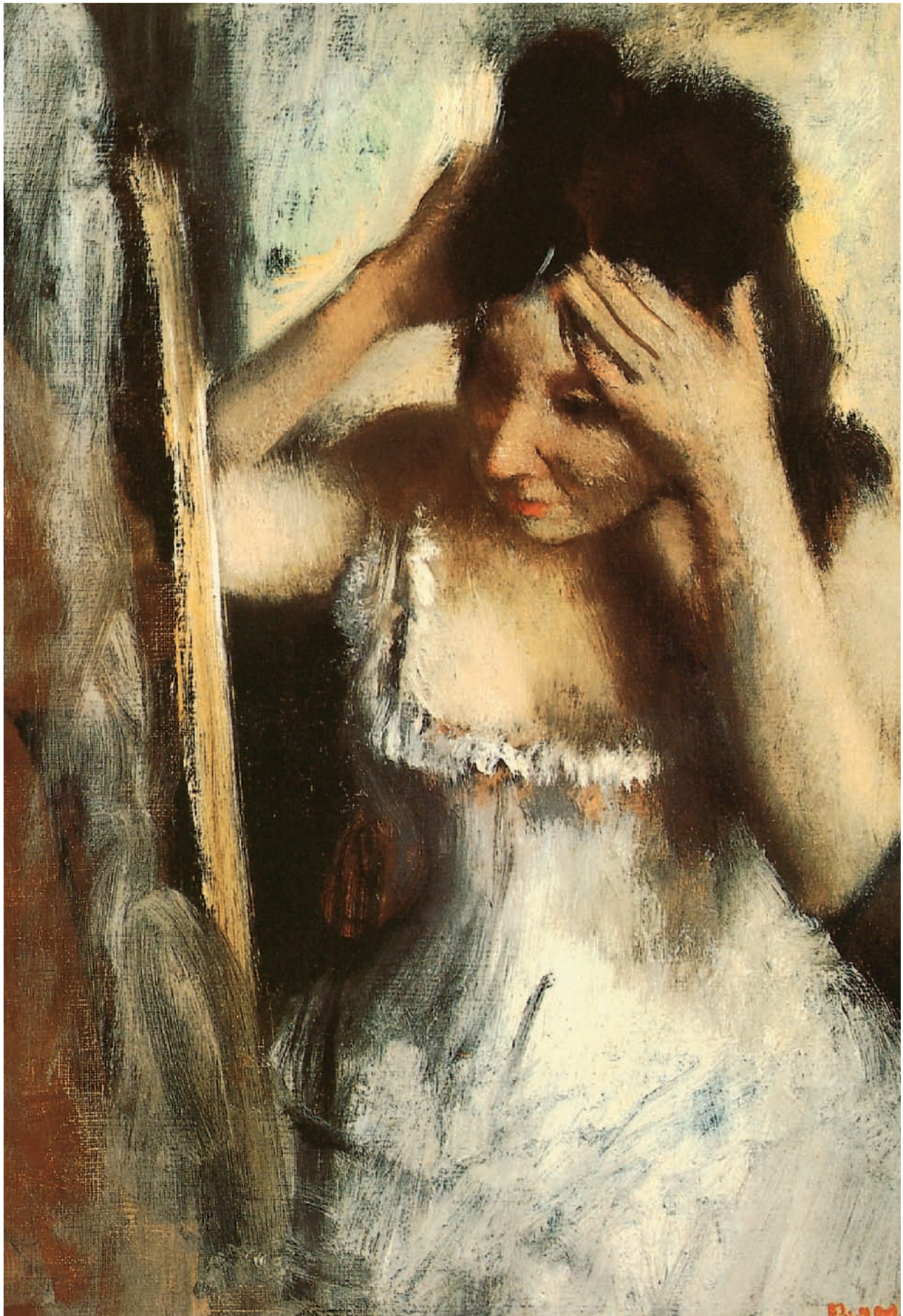
The papers that I read here speak at great length on the subject of the Opera. There must be some powerful intrigues beneath the surface.

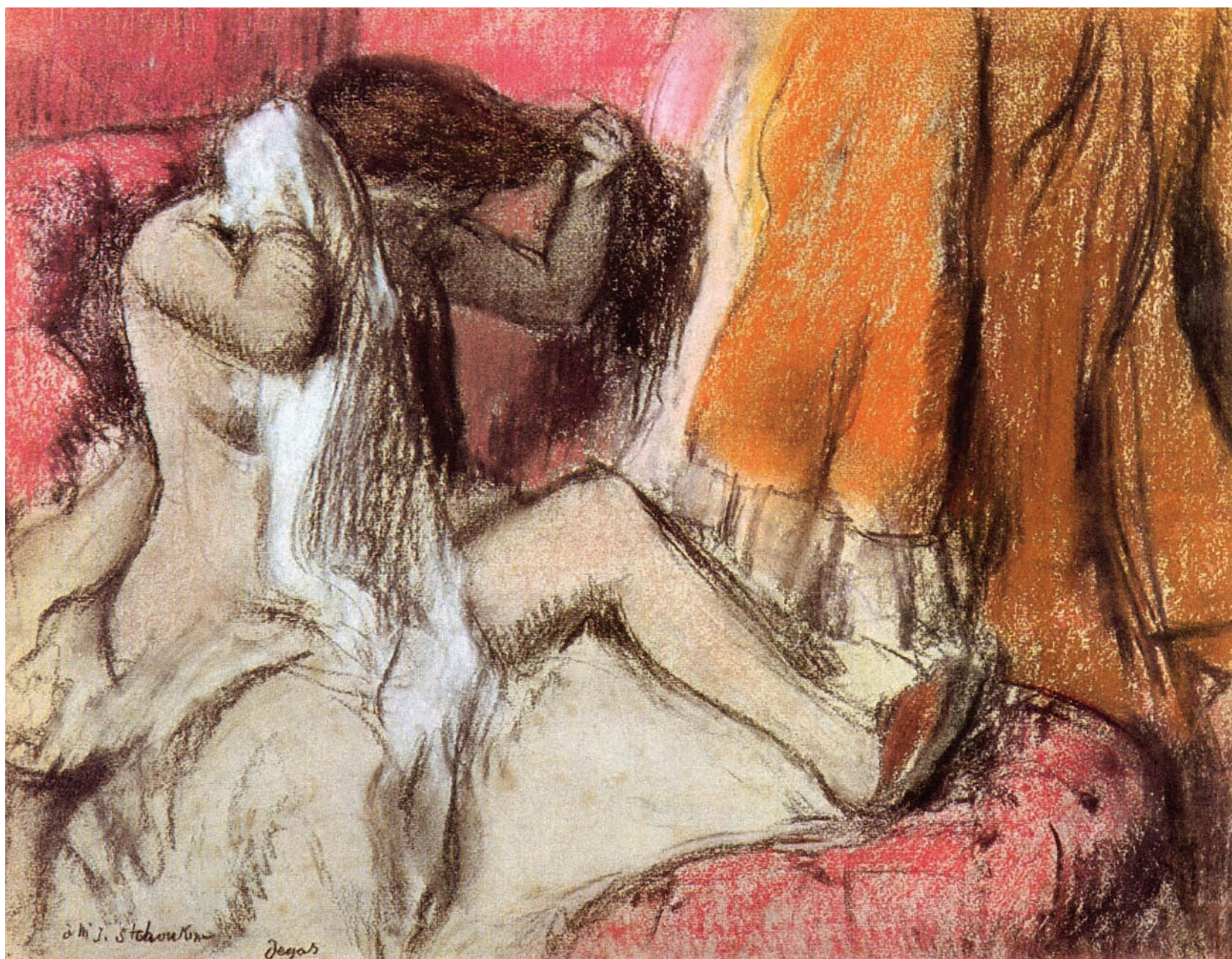
I am not forgetting that I must ask you to give my condolences to Mme Faure. There are some for you too. But all this is very late.

Please accept, dear Mr Faure, my best regards. And even had these last accidents not occurred there would still be apologies.

Edg. Degas

Greetings to Lecht.







To Bracquemondiii

Hotel de Turin, 77, rue Blanche
Tuesday, 1874

A line from Burty^{iv}, my dear Bracquemond, tells me that yesterday he made a new adherent of you and that you want to arrange a rendezvous for a talk. To begin with, we open on the fifteenth. We must hurry, then. We shall have to rearrange our rendezvous for the 6th or 7th then, or perhaps a little later, but soon enough that we can make the catalogue for the opening day. There is space there (Boulevard des Capucines, Nadar's old workshop), and a unique situation, etc., etc., etc. Has Burty given you any details, or would you like a summary of all the information? I will meet with you; you may change the date if it does not suit you. Thursday morning at 11 o'clock, at our premises. Have a look at the place; we can talk after if there is still the need for it. You will make a most prolific adherent. Be assured that you are doing us a great pleasure and service. (Manet, excited about Fantin and terrified of himself, is still reluctant, but nothing seems decided yet.)

Greetings,
Degas



To Bracquemond

Tuesday, 2 o'clock, 13 May 1879

My Dear Friend,

Yes, certainly, the exhibition has closed. So why do you leave your things? Hurry up. There is also 439.50 francs to draw per person which is quite good. If you cannot find Portier, our manager, go to 54, rue Lepic where he lives. Or else I shall draw it for you.

I spoke to Caillebotte about the journal, he is willing to guarantee it for us. Come and talk it over with me. No time to lose!

This morning I went with Prunaire, the wood engraver, you must know him, to see a certain Geoffroy, a famous phototyper, rue Campagne Premiere. A strange man, an inventor with bad eyes.

We must be quick and make the most of our gains boldly, boldly above the poor world.

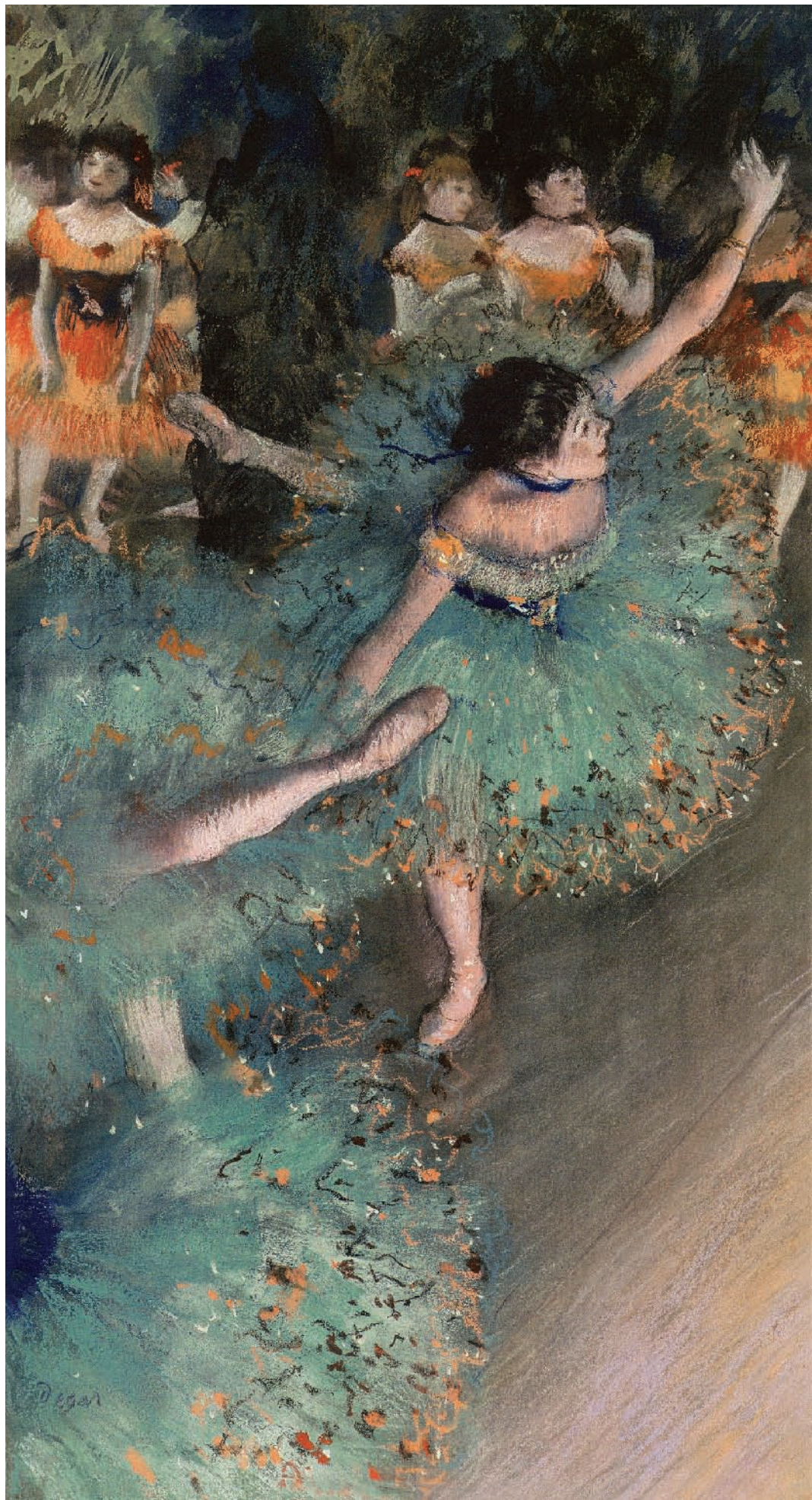
Yesterday a big discussion with Vibert who begs to be told why he is considered stupid.

Congratulations to your wife above all for the two sides of her cartoon.

Yes, indeed, next year we must make a powerful effort. Do find time to spend a day with me. There are a number of things to be fixed and arranged for our journal so that we can show our capitalists some definite programme.

Sincerely yours,
Degas







To Bracquemond

Undated. Probably end of 1879 or the beginning of 1880.

How I need to see you, Bracquemond, and how badly I let you down!

1st. Let me know if my friend Rossana could work in your Haviland house; he is a man of much talent, landscapist and animal painter, very sensitive, should be able to do flowers delightfully, grasses, etc. I was supposed to have written to you about him a long time ago.

2nd. We must discuss the journal. Pissarro and I together made various attempts of which one by Pissarro is a success. At the moment, Mlle Cassatt is full of it. Impossible for me, with my living to earn, to devote myself entirely to it as yet. So let us arrange to spend a whole day together, either here or at your house. Have you a press at your place? Your wife is still preparing her exhibition, is she not?

See you soon,
Degas

I heard that you have the commission for Delacroix's *Boisry d'Anglas*. It is what you so much wanted. Long live the leading profession!



To Bracquemond

1880

My Dear Bracquemond,

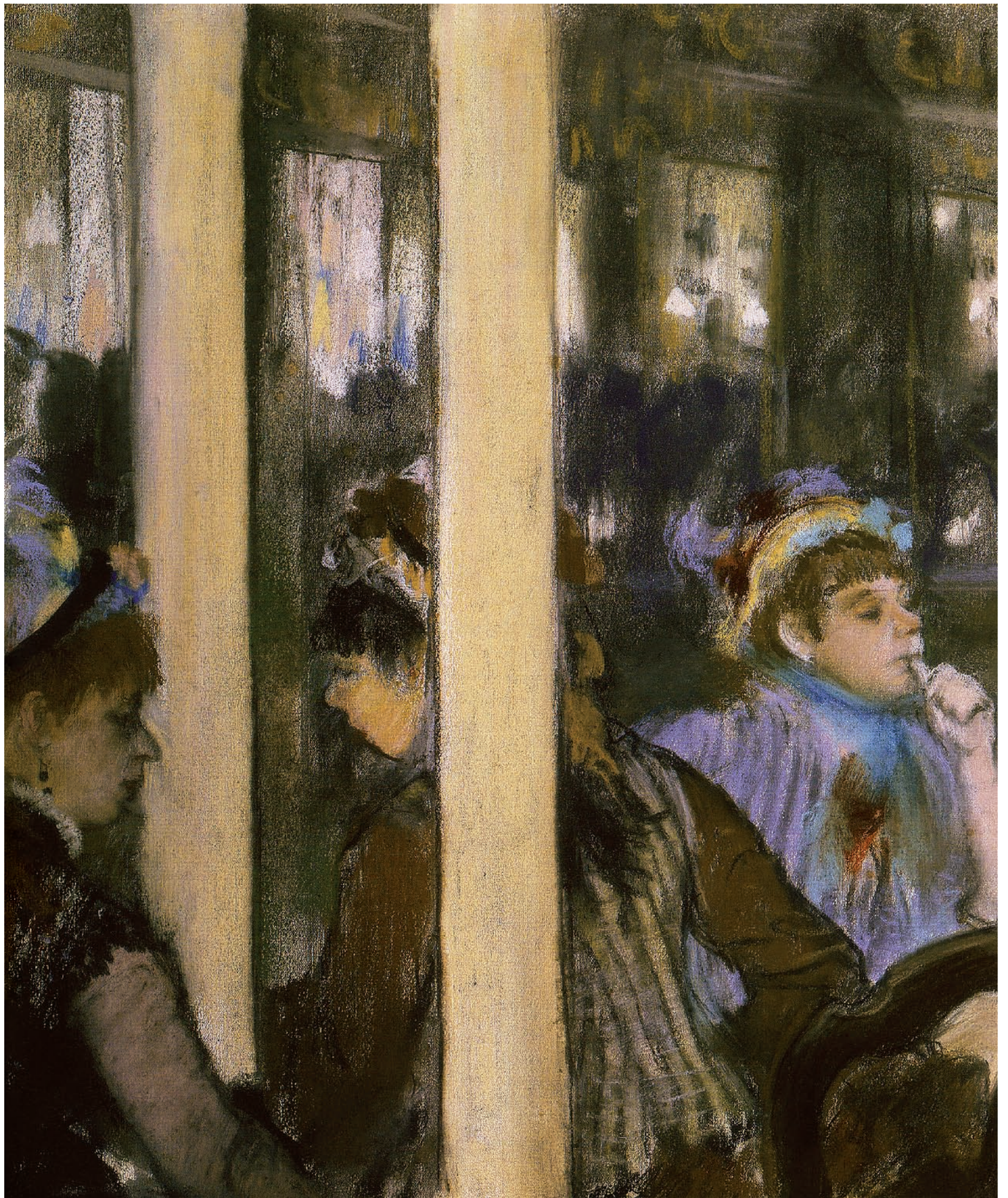
It is opening on April 1st. The posters will be up tomorrow or Monday. They are in bright red letters on a green background. There was a big fight with Caillebotte as to whether or not to put the names. I had to give in and let him put them up. When on earth will they stop the headlines? Mlle Cassatt and Mme Morisot did not insist on being on the posters. It was done the same way as last year and Mme Bracquemond's name will not appear – it is idiotic. All the good reasons and the good taste in the world can achieve nothing against the inertia of the others and the obstinacy of Caillebotte.

In view of the frenzied advertisement made by de Nittis and Monet (in the *Vie Moderne*), our exhibition promises to be quite inglorious. Next year, I promise you, I shall take steps to see that this does not continue. I am miserable about it, humiliated.

Start bringing your things. There will probably be two panel screens, one in the centre of the room with the four windows and the other in the entrance room. You will be able to arrange your entire stock of engravings on them.

See you soon,
Degas

If you insist and Mme Bracquemond insists, too, her name can be put on the second thousand posters during the exhibition. Answer.







To Camille Pissarro

1880

My Dear Pissarro,

I compliment you on your enthusiasm; I hurried to Mademoiselle Cassatt with your parcel. She congratulates you as I do in this matter.

Here are the proofs: The prevailing blackish or rather greyish shade comes from the zinc which is greasy in itself and retains the printers black. The plate is not smooth enough. I feel sure that you have not the same facilities at Pontoise as at the rue de la Huchette. In spite of that you must have something a bit more polished.

In any case, you can see what possibilities there are in the method. It is necessary for you to practise dusting the particles in order, for instance, to obtain a sky of a uniform grey, smooth and fine. That is very difficult, if one is to believe Maître Bracquemond. It is, perhaps, fairly easy if one wants only to do engravings after original art.

This is the method. Take a very smooth plate (it is essential, you understand). De-grease it thoroughly with whitening. Previously you will have prepared a solution of resin in very concentrated alcohol. This liquid, poured after the manner of photographers when they pour collodion onto their glass plates (take care, as they do, to drain the plate well by inclining it) this liquid then evaporates and leaves the plate covered with a coating, more or less thick, of small particles of resin. In allowing it to bite, you obtain a network of lines, deeper or less deep, according as to whether you allowed it to bite more or less. To obtain equal hues this is necessary; to get less regular effects you can obtain them with a stump or with your finger or any other pressure on the paper which covers the soft background.

Your soft background seems to me to be a little too greasy. You have added a little too much grease or tallow.

What did you blacken your background with to get that bistre tone behind the drawing? It is very pretty.

Try something a little larger with a better plate.

With regard to the colour, I shall have your next lot printed with a coloured ink. I have also other ideas for coloured plates.

So do also try something a little more finished. It would be delightful to see the outlines of the cabbages very well defined. Remember that you must make your début with one or two very, very beautiful plates of your own work.

I am also going to get down to it in a day or two.

Caillebotte, so I am told, is doing the *refuges of the Boulevard Hanssmann* seen from his window.

Could you find someone at Pontoise who could cut some things you traced on very light copper? That kind of pattern could be applied on a line proof – touched up a little for effect – of etchings and then the exposed parts printed with porous wood coated with watercolours. That would enable one to try some attractive experiments with original prints and curious colours. Work a little on that if you can. I shall soon send you some of my own attempts along these lines. It would be economical and new, and would, I think, be suitable enough for a beginning.

No need to compliment you on the quality of the art of your vegetable gardens.

Only as soon as you feel a little more accustomed try on a larger scale with more finished things.

Be of good cheer,
Degas

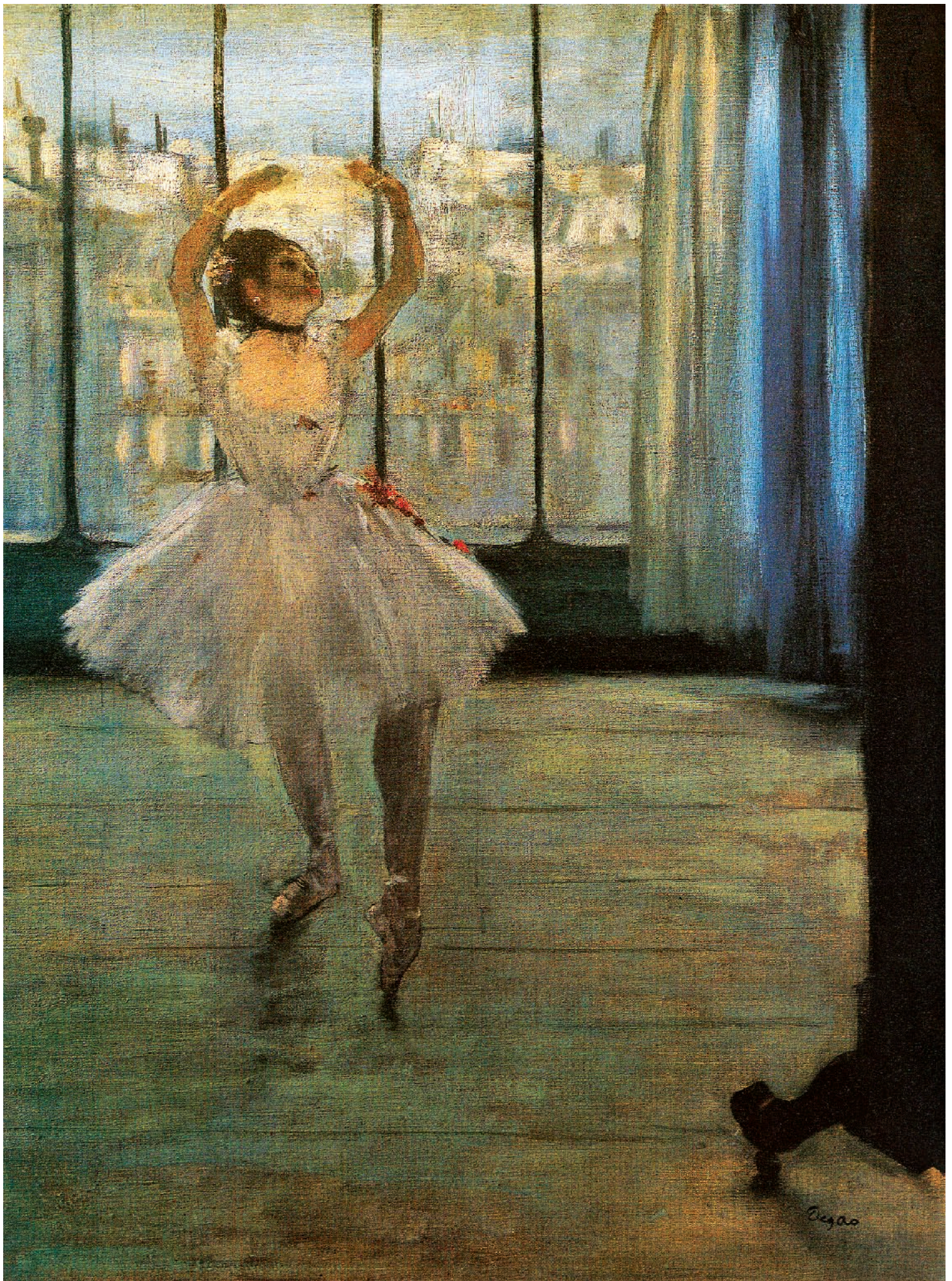


To Henri Rouart

Paris
Tuesday, 26 Oct.

Thank you for your pencilled letter, my dear Rouart. The sirocco, it appears, dries up the ink as it does oil colours and the vitality of the painters. Ah! How I regret not having been able to go down there with you to see these dear friends. And then, to tell you at once, it is comparatively rare, I am in the mood to love grand nature a little. You would have had as companion a changed.

I am just off to the boulevard Voltaire to dine with your brother. Mud, mud, mud, umbrellas. In the evening hours it is nevertheless very beautiful!







To Alexis Rouartv

1882

My dear friend, it was only yesterday that I had this little attempt with carbon crayon printed. You see what a pretty grey it is. One should have emery pencils. Do give me an idea how to make them myself. I could not talk about it with your brother on Friday. Thank you for the stone you gave me. It scratches copper in a most delightful manner. Is it a conglomerate like Denis Poulot makes? I read Delanoue the Elder with the magnifying glass.

On what could I use it as an etching point? No time to do some really serious experiments. Always articles to fabricate. The last is a monochrome fan for Mr Beugniet. I think only of engraving and do none.

Greetings,
Degas



To J.E. Blanche

1882

Dear Monsieur Blanche,

I shall enquire at the Opera if they have a seat free for the three days. I shall take Monday as I have always done and you will make arrangements with a friend for the other two days, like you told me. The seat will be in my name and I shall have the right to go behind the scenes. This is a first suggestion which I consider much too agreeable for me and not enough so for you. Going behind the scenes attracts you and I am preventing it. But perhaps you are the kind of man either to console yourself, or as an art critic to have permission in any case, or simply as a spoilt child to demand it as a right.

Vaucorbeil is still ill and Ephrussi (Charles) on the best of terms with Darcel, the secretary of the Opera.

On the other hand, I do not know if it will be easy to find someone to replace me for Monday's seat in which case I shall be saddled with it until a new subscriber takes it off me. And then your letter makes me think that you thought I had a subscription for all three days and was willing to give up two, more particularly one day. No, I only have Mondays and that is sometimes too much.

And then I should like to keep the right side. Tell me if you have a friend all ready to take the third day. This is all rather difficult to arrange.

With regard to the sending of the huge sum, we are still far removed from that.

Write to Ephrussi, he will dictate your, he will dictate our, conduct.

Sincerest regards,
Degas







To Bartholomé

Paris
5 Aug. 1882

I have surprised you my dear friend. It is true I am down and up again very quickly. And so I arrived Monday evening, I found your message and the next morning, Tuesday, rue Bayard, they told me that you had already decamped the evening before. Eight days at Étretat, it was a long time for me. Halévy is good but mournful, I can neither play piquet nor billiards nor do I know how to pay attention to people nor how to work after nature nor simply how to be agreeable in society. I think I weighed a bit heavily on them and that they had thought I was more resourceful.

When are you coming back? For I am alone here. Paris is charming and is not work the only possession one can always have at will?

Monday morning sitting with Pagans, before his departure for Spain. Mme Camus is said to have wept for spite and for passion for the guitar in front of a good general who teaches her.

J.E. Blanche sent me a big article in the Standard where I was flattered in a few courteous and pinched lines. I should pinch them, too, were I not afraid of spoiling the abscess before it is ripe. He is said to have tried to get hold of Gervex again, a new man decorated and more useful.



To Bartholomé

Wednesday, Spring 1883

Change of air, that must do you good even in this filthy weather! That must cure you of not being warmed all day by a stove, warmed also by painting. I really must force myself, now that the days are growing longer, only to remain half the day, either morning or afternoon, in my studio, and to go for walks. *Ambulare*, here is a new motto, *postea laborare*.

Manet is done for. That doctor Hureau de Villeneuve is said to have poisoned him with too much diseased rye seed. Some papers, they say, have already taken care to announce his approaching end to him. His family will, I hope, have read them before he did. He is not in the least aware of his dangerous condition and he has a gangrenous foot.







To Henri Rouart

16 Oct. 1883

My dear friend, this letter will just reach you at Venice. So the separation that Mme Rouart wished for will be less complete than necessary.

On Saturday we buried Alfred Niaudet. Do you remember the guitar soiree at the house, nearly a year and a half ago? I was counting up the friends present, we were 27. Now four have gone. The Milles Cassatt were to have come, one of them is dead. That would have made it five. Let us try and stick to this earth however republican it may be.

You love nature as much as humidity. In spite of that do me the favour of leaving your two friends for a moment to go, in dryness, to the palais Labia to see, partly for yourself and partly for me, the frescoes of Tiepolo. Forain, yes Forain, gave me a glimpse of them on the table at the Café La Rochefoucauld, which he ended by comparing them to a poster by Chéret. It is his way of admiring them. Perhaps it is no worse than any other.

Had I accompanied you, I should have given a prelude to the portrait of your daughter in the heart of Venice where her hair and her complexion were once famous. But I remained here because there are such things as rent.



To Ludovic Halévy

Nov. 1883

The little Chabot arrived both very surprised and very pleased at having been called to M. Meyers to renew her engagement. The Mlles Salle and Sacré were called at the same time. She was offered a sum that she says is very small. She was getting 2,200, they offered her 2,400. We must try and help her to get 2,600 or 2,800 for the first year. Moreover, Mr Meyer offers her 2,700 for the next year, that is to say for 1885; and for 1886, 3,000 francs. So it is an increase of 200 or 300 francs at most for which she is asking for this year and she says that she deserves it for all sorts of reasons: she was a pupil at 16 years, she was moved up after each examination etc.

So try to get her:

1st. 2,700 francs or 2,800 francs for 1884;

2nd. 3,000 francs for 1885;

3rd. 3,500 francs for 1886.

The contract she has to sign is for 3 years.

The petitioner is in a great hurry and quite simply wishes you to go to the Opera this evening. I am much afraid that you will have to go to the *Rois en Exil* or even to *Simon Boccanegra* where I am presenting myself this evening at no. 177 in the name of Mr Verdi.

In a word, do what you think best, write to Mr Vaucorbeil, for it would seem to be really urgent. Moreover, you know how everything is done at the Opera.

Greetings,

Degas

The said demoiselle Chabot sends you her respects.







To Madame Bartholomé (née de Fleury)

Monday, *Undated*

Dear Madame,

Be good enough to grant me yet another little leave of absence for Wednesday. Something surprising has happened. A painter Henri Lerolle who, so I was told, was in the process of being decorated in the space left empty between his Salon and the Exposition Triennale or Nationale and whom I knew to be quite well off, has just invited me to dinner. The right he has is still recent, but fairly weighty. In agreement with his wife, who is said to manage him, he has just, at a moment like this, bought a little picture of mine of horses, belonging to Durand-Ruel^{vi}. And he writes admiringly of it to me (style Saint-Simon), and wishes to entertain me with his friends, and although most of the legs of the horses in his fine picture (mine) are rather badly placed, yet, in my modesty, I should very much enjoy a little esteem at dinner. Just this once, dear Madame, permit me to become intoxicated with the perfume of glory, from the other side of the water, behind the Invalides, Avenue Duquesne. If nothing happens to intoxicate me, not even the wine, why should I not go and present myself to you for a moment, about 10:30, with an air of success.

Your friend,
Degas



To Bartholomé

16 Aug. 1884

So you are going to proceed by way of confiscation, my dear friend? What will you confiscate in the horrible human heart? I do not know where my friends can sit down in it, there are no more chairs; there is the bed which cannot be confiscated and where I really sleep too much, for this morning at 7 o'clock, after having left it for a moment to go and open the window and set about writing to you before the postman left, I remained there in order to enjoy the morning more deeply. Yes, I am getting ungrateful, and I am getting so in a state of coma, which makes this illness irremediable. After having cut art in two, as you remind me, I shall cut my own beautiful head in two, and Sabine will preserve it for the sake of its shape in a jar.

Is it the country, is it the weight of my fifty years that makes me as heavy and as disgusted as I am? They think I am jolly because I smile stupidly, in a resigned way. I am reading *Don Quixote*. Ah! Happy man and what a beautiful death.

Let your wife, being in such good health, not curse me too much and let her ask herself if I am really worth the trouble. And let her keep her anger and her tenderness for a man who is young, confident, proud, simple, bold, and soft, supple and hard, painter and writer, writer and father, and even more astonishing than he thinks, writes or lets others write and says so: Long live J.F. Raflaelli. He is, I tell you, the man we need.

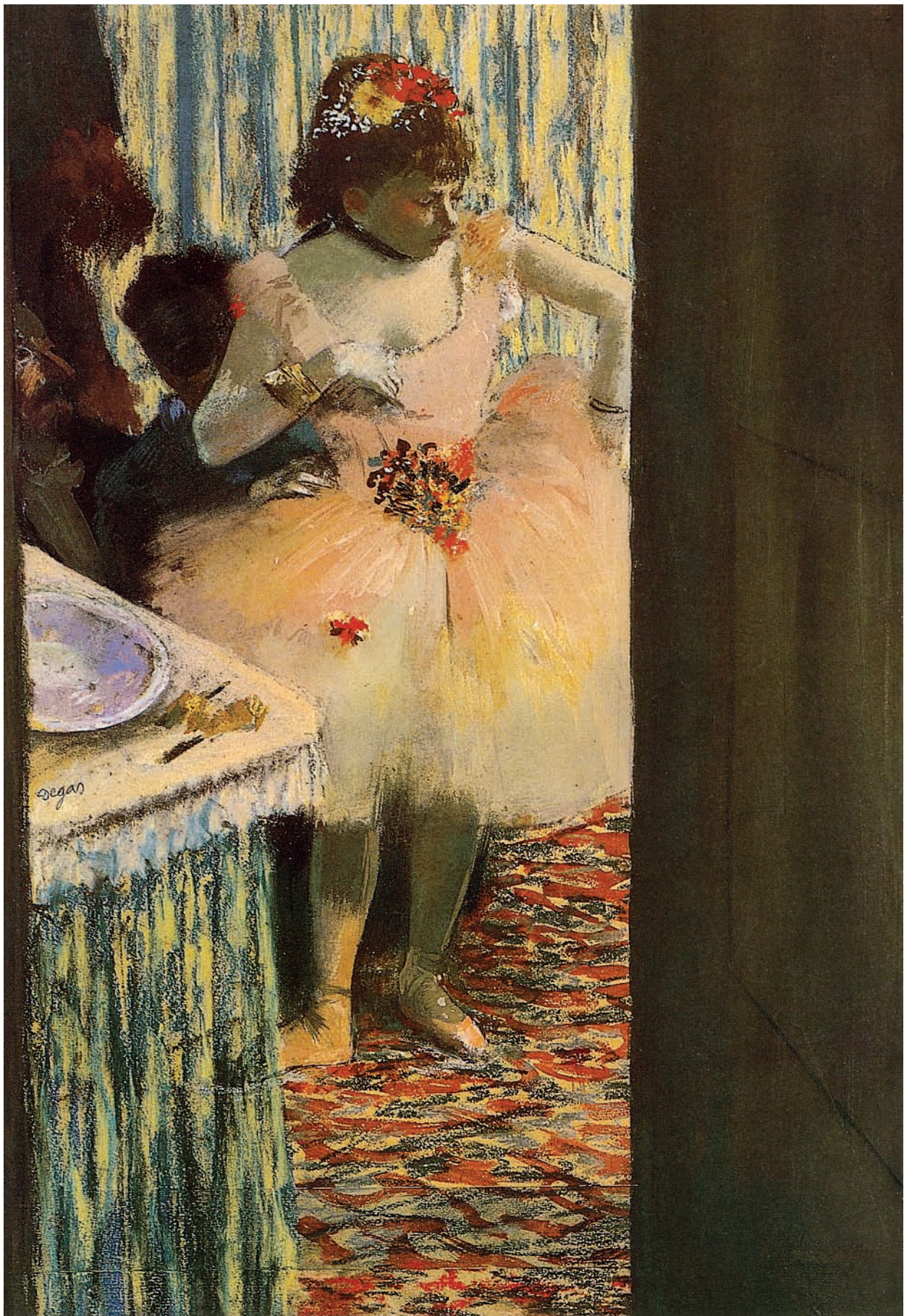
Your medallion should have angered me. And I cheered it as if it were of gold. Long live Sandoval too, the man who lets houses, the man who pays his rent without any other way judging of your merit.

I am cracking coarse jests for you and I have not the taste for them. Ah! where are the times when I thought myself strong. When I was full of logic, full of plans. I am sliding rapidly down the slope and rolling I know not where, wrapped in many bad pastels, as if they were packing paper.

Goodbye, my sincere regards all the same to your excellent wife and to you.

Degas







To Henry Lerolle

21 Aug. 1884

If you reply, my dear Lerolle, you will most certainly tell me that I am a queer specimen. Why did I not write to you before your departure and after having received the box of sugared almonds, really I hardly know. If you were single, 50 years of age (for the last month), you would know similar moments when a door shuts inside one and not only on one's friends. One suppresses everything around one and, once all alone, one finally kills oneself out of disgust. I have made too many plans, here I am blocked, impotent. And then I have lost the thread of things. I thought there would always be enough time. Whatever I was doing, whatever I was prevented from doing, in the midst of all my enemies and in spite of my infirmity of sight, I never despaired of getting down to it some day.

I stored up all my plans in a cupboard and always carried the key on me. I have lost that key. In a word, I am incapable of throwing off the state of coma into which I have fallen. I shall keep busy, as people say who do nothing, and that is all.

I write you all this without real need to do so, it would have sufficed to ask your pardon very humbly for my rudeness.

But I remember that Alexis Rouart told me that upon leaving Paris you were going near Vimoutiers. This letter that I am addressing 20, Avenue Duquesne will follow you and this time (it is you who must answer me) I am sure of a reply.

I must tell you that I, too, am near Vimoutiers with a friend of my childhood days, perhaps only a few leagues from you. Write to me to Château de Ménil-Hubert, Gacé (Orne).

If you are where I think you are, I shall go and see you at once.

My kind regards to your wife.

Sincerely yours,
D.



To Henri Rouart

Château de Ménil-Hubert, Gacé (Orne)
22 Aug. 1884

My dear friend, the other day Mme Rouart's letter was brought to me in the cab which was taking me to Normandy, your concierge will have confirmed this.

I should have been pleased to see you and had I known you were arriving at 5 o'clock on Friday the 9th I should have gone straight away in the evening to the rue Lisbonne. I kept on postponing and postponing. My aunt had a rather disgruntled, rather imperious, letter written to me. Upon receiving this, I announced that I would be there at the said time.

And now the weather is magnificent weather for you (deep down, I am not really wicked), but I have no real confidence in the aneroid barometer which says that it is to continue. One should believe in nothing but rain in France. Here, we are in a large, hollow park with very high dense trees and water which rises everywhere from under your feet. There are some pastures where it is like walking on sponges. Why do the animals that feed and do their business in these damp pasturing grounds not get rheumatism and why do they not pass it on to us who eat them?

I am trying a little to work. The first days I felt stifled and dazed by the amount of air. I am recovering, I am trying to eat little. Well, however do you manage to arrive in a country, quite unprepared, and work the next day at 6 o'clock in the morning, the same day if you travel at night? You love nature more than I do, you will reply. Meanwhile it is I, not you, who am face to face with nature. And, in spite of all, I am a little beside myself. I am attempting work which would take 10 years to finish and I leave it after 10 minutes without regrets, said Rousseau in the île de St-Pierre.

Well it is a long time since we saw each other, my dear friend. My absence has been enormous, it will soon be over. I cannot say quite definitely if I am not very well here.

I can feel that your wife is angry with me, that I have not behaved well to you, that I arranged my departure badly to coincide with your arrival. It is true. I shall do better another time.

As I shall still be facing nature for another short week and as I did not reply to your good letter from Le Mans, I am counting on a word from you, who are never angry with me. Your daughter, who already had such a pretty complexion before, must be quite dazzling now, she should come out.

A thousand greetings,
Degas







To Ludovic Halévy

Ménil-Hubert
1884

My Dear Friend,

Sabine quite simply posted on your telegram which reached me this morning, Saturday, which, apart from its urgent friendliness, is not otherwise serious.

But! This bust! So you think it is nothing, you do not believe that I am fanatically keen about it with (style Goncourt) a family bending over my talent? You want me to take advantage of the fine weather and leave, and they put it forwards to make me stay. And then there is the bust, I swear to you that it is a bust with arms and that I want to press on with it. If I leave it, it is lost.

Look here, by arriving towards the end of next week, one could still be well received if you are still there, could one not?

But I shall miss Cave, that is the meaning of your wire.

Best regards to Louise and to you,
Degas

To come straight to Dieppe from here without passing through Paris, I leave that problem to your great mind.



To Henri Rouart

Saturday

My dear friend, I, too, go to the country. But what terribly fine weather, what heat and how badly I can stand it! As I should sleep all day and as I am writing to you about 4 o'clock with the shutters closed, it will not last or else I shall return to town, where the too beautiful weather is yet easier to bear.

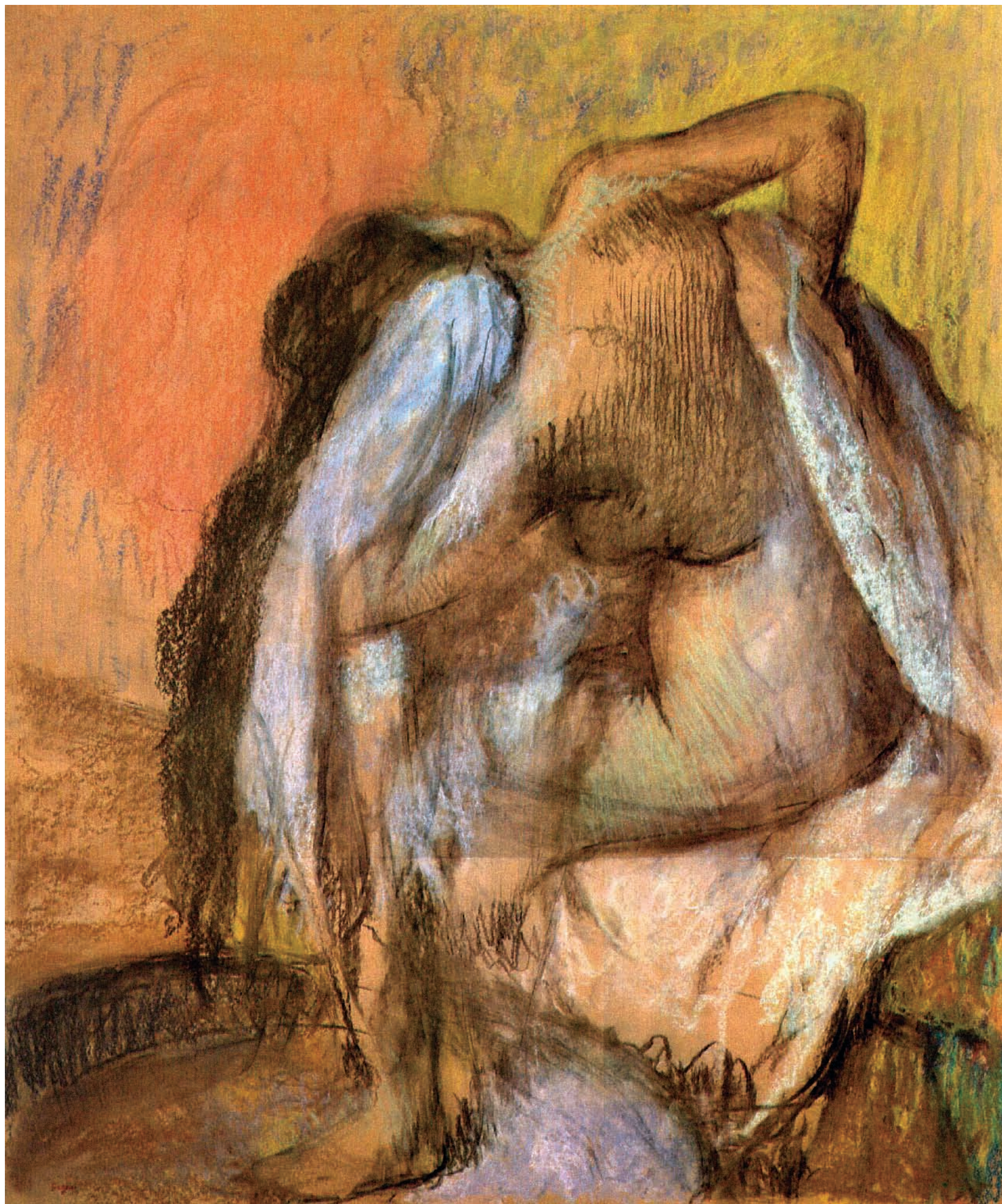
Le Mans is 20 leagues from here, doubtless you are still there, but I have only just arrived, and it must keep for another time. And then this evening a family is arriving who would not like to be the pretext for my flight.

Your good letter nearly missed me. I begin by placing all my sentiments at the feet of your great wife, whom I never visited and who finds it so hard to forgive people who are not as good as her husband who, so she says incessantly, is too much so. I am not well versed in arguments to appease her and I prefer repeating all manner of compliments on the young aquarellist to whom she gave birth.

...What you tell me about young Colin makes me very eager to see his sketches. How lovely natural dispositions and talent are – and how necessary it is to have something more!

I am anxious to rest and to regain the taste for work. In spite of the difficulties of the situation I had been sunk in gloom. It will be terribly necessary to stop up the gaps. I have made a few sales which will secure me until the end of this year. So all is not disheartening.

Seated Female Nude Drying Neck and Back.







To Ludovic Halévy

Ménil-Hubert

My Dear Friend,

I am very much afraid I shall not get there at all. I am being kept, or rather, I alone am keeping myself here until the end of the week to finish a bust with arms. It is long but most amusing. And the interest shown me resembles malignant curiosity. Which results in a fanatic effort on my part to obtain a likeness and even something more.

Once in Paris my first task will be to finish a commission. But will there still be time to go to Dieppe? Do not be angry with me and expect me all the same, one fine day when it is fine. I see that you are even more satisfied with the man of taste. And I shall miss him! My regards to Louise.

Sincerely yours,
Degas

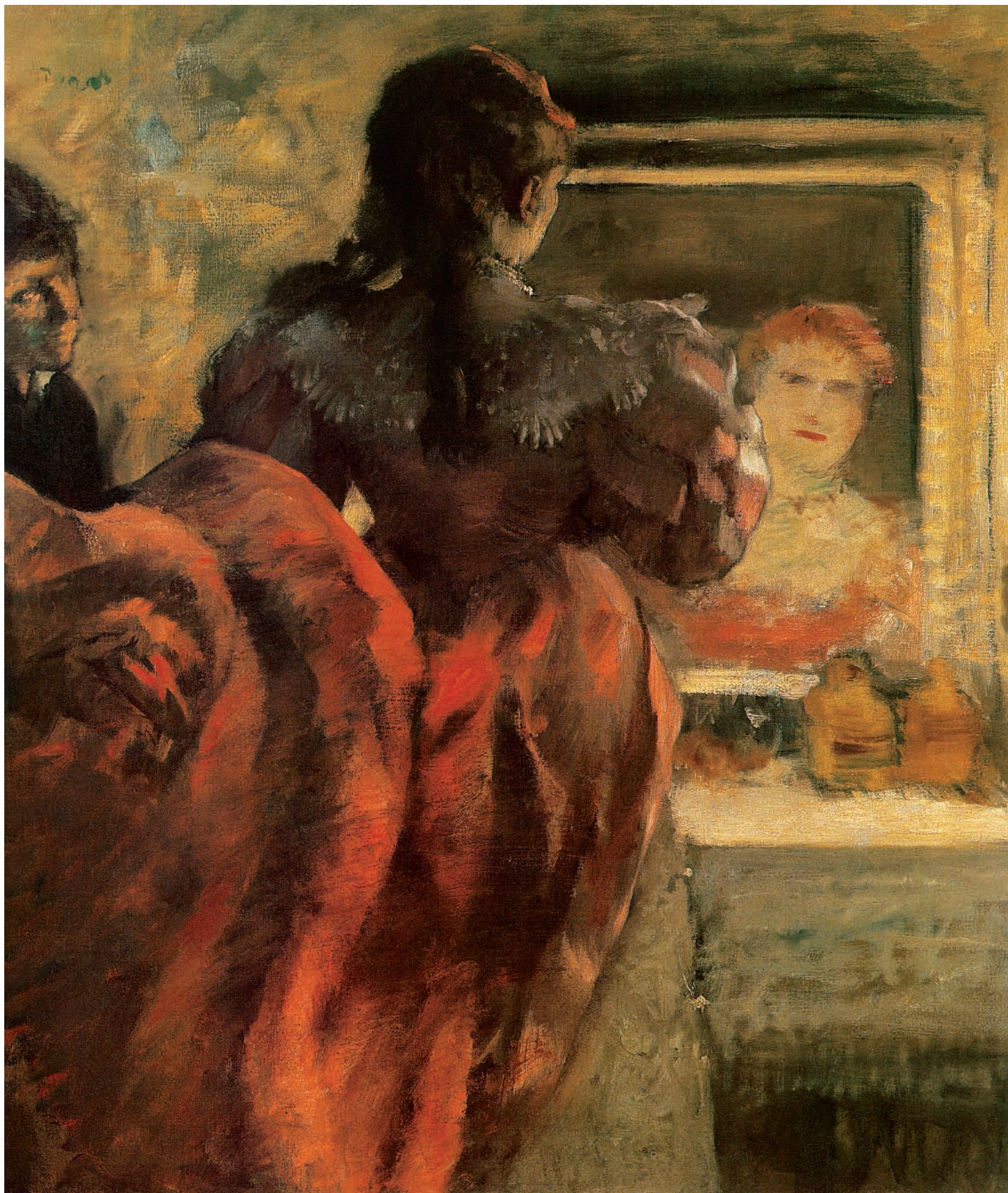


To Bartholomé

Ménil-Hubert
Monday, 15 Sept. 1884

The little ointment, made by your own hands, my dear friend, reached me – I rubbed it on and cannot deny that it did me good. One can return from further afield.

If you wish me to tell you why I am still here I shall do so – ‘So you are doing nothing of Hortense, said her mother to me? Then who do you imagine will do anything?’ And so as to occupy myself I set to work on a large bust with arms out of clay mixed with small pebbles. The family follows my work with more curiosity than emotion. In a word one only amuses oneself with things one cannot do if one is as ill-balanced as I am. And except for my legs which are boring into my body and my arms which by dint of stretching are tiring, and my stomach, things are not too bad. I shall certainly be back in Paris by the end of this week, and after a few weeks spent in earning my bread, it will be necessary to return to Normandy with a moulder to assure the cast and also the durability of the work. The family is assisting as Norman peasants, doubt painted on their faces and installed deep in their hearts.







To Bartholomé

Ménil-Hubert
Friday, 3 Oct. 1884

I cannot resist the vanity of the poet, my dear friend, and the madrigal I am sending you, which, according to custom, has been done negligently and with the inconvenience of an after thought, will give you an idea of my way of being gallant and idiotic. A comedy for four people entitled *Le Rival au Berceau* was acted a few days ago for the first time and yesterday for the second time by Miles Yalpinçon and Pothau, Mrs Felotrappe and Louis Brinquant (the first a Desgenais, a Landrol, the second, a young leading comedian, a Coquelin). I took no part in the play and to hide my mortification whilst exploiting it, I wrote in blank verse the small piece that follows: it was hardly understood, it was too subtle, but an odour of old world gallantry was discovered in it which, you know well, has always been personal to me. Here it is:

You wished to give pleasure
To Yourself by acting in a play
And it is us that you delight!
If you did not get full measure
Of what you desired tonight,
To applaud we alone have the right.
The public acclaims from all sides: All! All!
Ah! Youth so gay
The ear hears less than beholds the eye
And I dare swear that is why
One must laugh today
That you, traitress fair,
Should be in despair
At being better than the play.

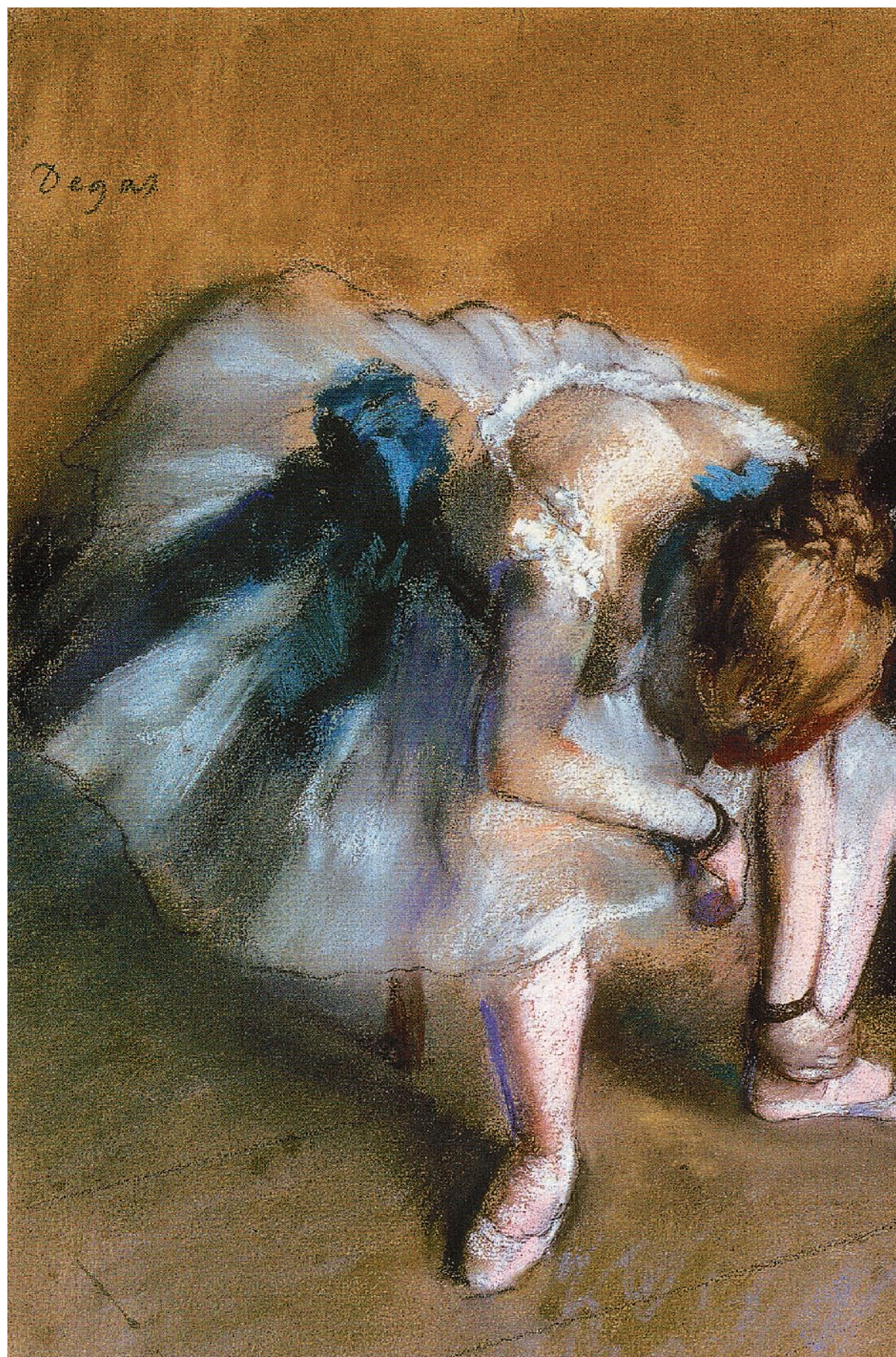
The reference at the end seems to me to have been noticed; I emphasised it enough I can assure you, and in this light and appropriate vein, it is in good taste.

I can feel the collar of my blue suit with the gold buttons rising to the nape of my neck and ... if you could be kind enough and find the time one of these days, provided you are here in time, to ask them to bury me in it. In growing old, everything transports me to the rococo of 60 years ago. It is there that Raffaelli d'Asnieres sees me and you, too, perhaps, man of taste.

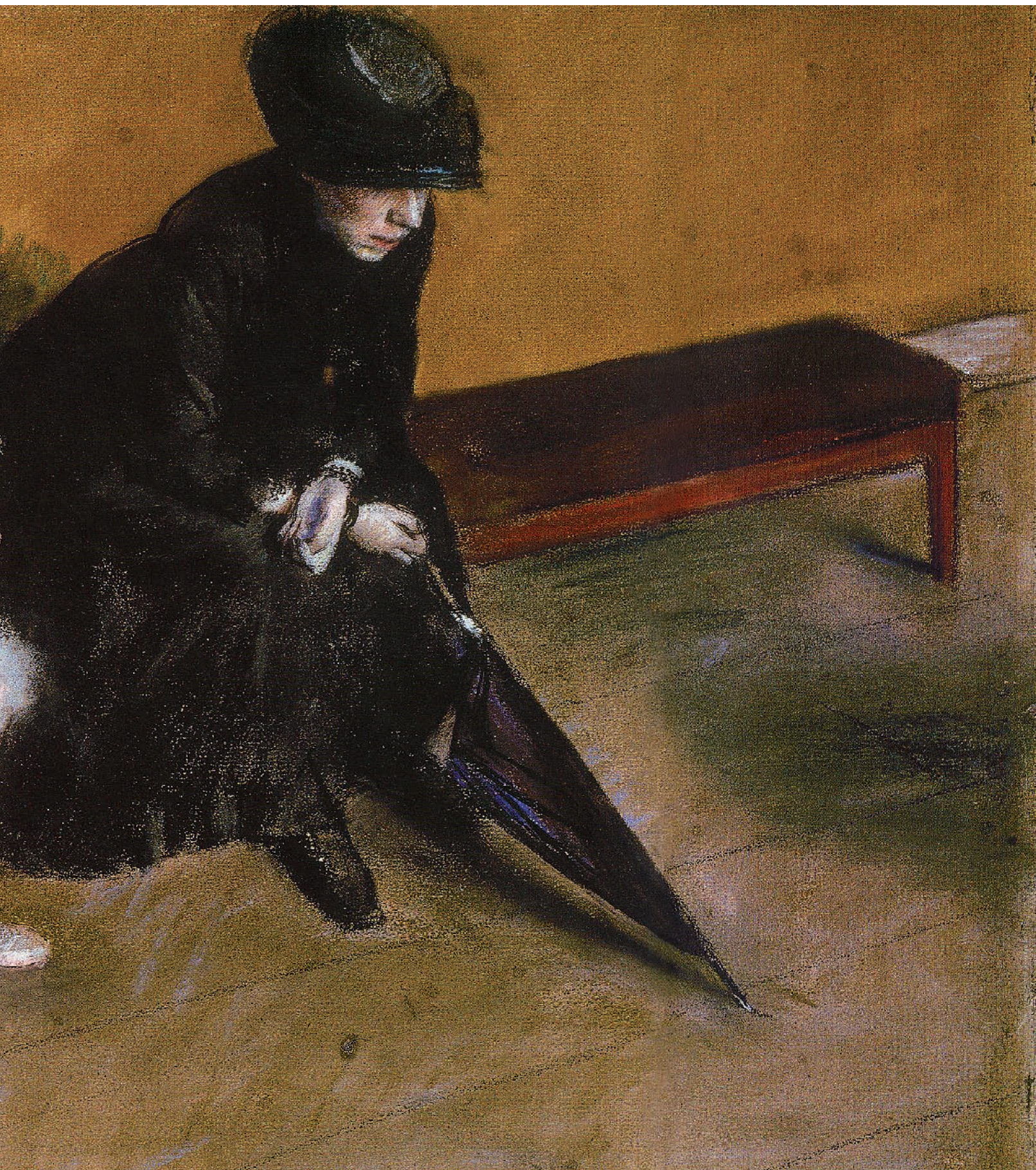
With regard to the bust, let it suffice for you to know that it is not finished, that it is horribly long, that I am returning to Paris on Sunday to finish some things and secure the inviolable rent for the 15th of this month. There are two arms, I have already told you so; let it also suffice for you to know that naturally one of them, where the hand is visible, is behind the back. Also, I am perhaps the only one for whom this goes very well.

Write to me to Paris. Good health, particularly for your wife who deserves it more than you do. Also greetings.

Degas



Waiting, 1880-1882.
Pastel, 48.3 x 61 cm.
Norton Simon Art Foundation,
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena.





To Durand-Ruel

Ménil-Hubert
Summer 1884

Dear Sir,

My maid will go and fetch a little money from you. She sent me this morning a threat of seizure from the taxes. I already paid more than half. It appears that the state wants the remainder immediately. Fifty francs will suffice. But if you could give her a hundred she could keep something for herself. I left her with very little and I am prolonging my stay here a little where it is so beautiful. Ah well! I shall stuff you with my products this winter and you, for your part, will stuff me with money.

It is much too irritating and humiliating to run after every five franc piece as I do.

Warmest greetings,
Degas

To Durand-Ruel

Dieppe
Oct. 1884

Dear Monsieur Durand-Ruel,

I received your mandate safely. If you could send me another for 50 francs I should be provided for. I reckon to be back on Wednesday during the evening. Enough of idling.

You are quite right. What lovely country. Every day we go for walks in the surroundings, which will finish up by turning me into a landscapist. But my unfortunate eyes would reject such a transformation.

I sympathise deeply with you in your Paris prison. And yet you will see with what serenity I shall return.

Kind regards,
Degas

Saturday. Still with Halévy, rue de la Grève, Dieppe.







To Henri Rouart

Monday morning

My Dear Friend,

I know quite well that you are returning soon and that I could easily not write to you. And then I have so little to tell you. As a matter of fact though, one often writes to one's friends to tell them nothing and that nevertheless implies that one was so pleased to receive something from them, to know that they are thinking of one and to be their friend.

So in the first place, give my regards to Mme Rouart. The waters did her good last year. Very likely she is better because of them this year. That is already something.

X ... must have rejoined you. This guide of the Pyrenees gave me the impression the other day of being very downhearted. We met in the neighbourhood of the Goupil house and he seemed fairly resigned to see the money coffers of this great house closed to him forever. He would have thought, or have had me believe, that Cabanel had something to do with it had I not told him that that was another illusion and that it all came from higher up and much further away.

I am joking, my dear friend, for want of something better to do. And how can one listen seriously to the misfortunes of others when one considers oneself so much above them in that respect. Really it is too much, so many necessary things are lacking at the same time. In the first place, my sight (health is the first of the worldly goods) is not behaving properly. Do you remember saying one day, we were speaking of someone, I cannot remember whom, who was growing old, that he could no longer connect. The term, applied in medicine, to impotent brains. This word, I always remember it, my sight no longer connects, or it is so difficult that one is often tempted to give it up and to go to sleep forever. It is also true that the weather is so varied; the moment it is dry I see better, considerably better, even though it takes some time to get accustomed to the strong light which hurts me in spite of my smoked glasses; but as soon as the dampness returns, I am like today. My sight burnt from yesterday and broken up today. Will this ever end and in what way?



To Henri Rouart

Undated

I am going to be punished, my dear Rouart, my letter will catch up with you in Paris, already back from Argelès. However, what calms me a little is a letter from Cherrils this morning who speaks of you as if you were still his neighbour (or nearly so) and he should be well posted.

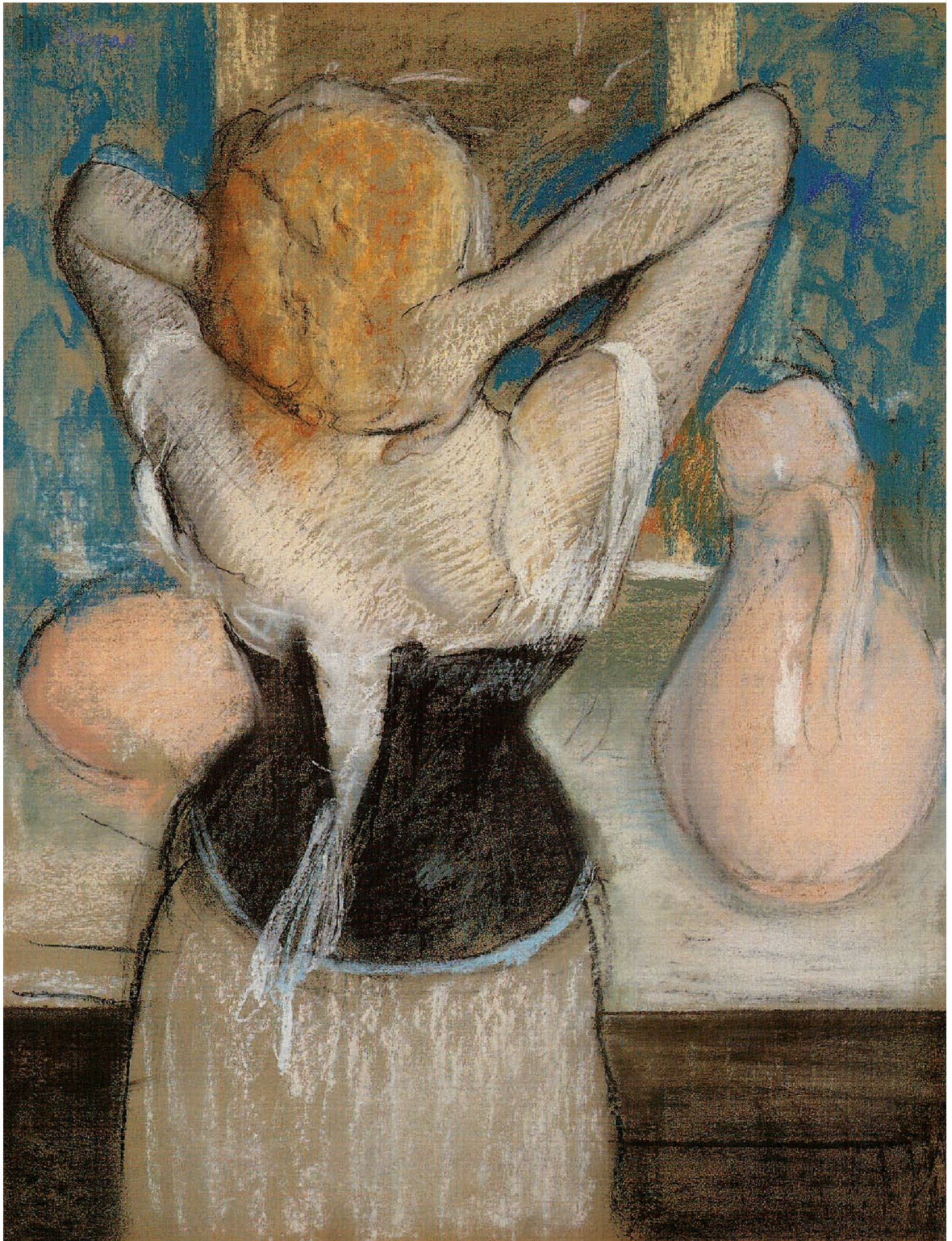
So Cauterets, according to the papers, is the centre of elegance in the Pyrenees and from what you tell me, I see that Argelès is no less well provided for.

Go, search no more for a site in the wilderness! Every year you have the same regrets and it is only right. The fortifications here are visited by more simple folk, certainly more to your taste, and you flee them. If it were not for the sake of joining your family, I could not understand your going so far. Long live the suburbs. I continually revert to this because I feel that in my hand lies the key to a great truth and this hand is not quite closed.

Cherfils writes from St-Jean-de-Luz. Will you go and see him? (It is possible that you have already seen him on your way back from Paris and that this letter is too late.)

When you are back for good you must come to the house at Louveciennes and you will tell me all the news. The aqueducts of Louis XIV are there, Monsieur Rouart, and they are good and the Marly watering place, too. And one thinks of Madame Dubarry who would not have had her head cut off had she loved her pavilion less, her sweetmeats and her diamonds shut up in a chest of Sèvres china. There you are!







To Henri Rouart

Wednesday, 1884 or 1885

You are coming back, my dear Rouart, and I could quite well not answer you, but in a little while the redoubtable Mme Rouart will say to me: 'Have you written to Henri?'

It is not possible that over there you are not enjoying the same fine weather that we are having here, and that the aquarelle is not progressing.

I can see X ... weighing you down. Heavier than air, Bouguereau, you will see, will yet end up by lifting him into his hotair balloon like Rousselin. We are friends without ballast and without weight. We shall remain on earth and shall know how to console ourselves.

I am just off to the portrait exhibition. I have been deeply engrossed and deeply irritated by the need for fabrication. Oh Ye Gods.

Very little time spent on the portrait of your daughter in spite of the pleasure it gives me to paint it. Oh Ye Gods!

Come back. I do not like writing.



To Bartholomé

Undated

It is here, I looked at it again this morning, with the folds of his buttocks over his orange loins. Goncourt thinks and writes in this manner when his friend Bartholomé sends him a pumpkin.

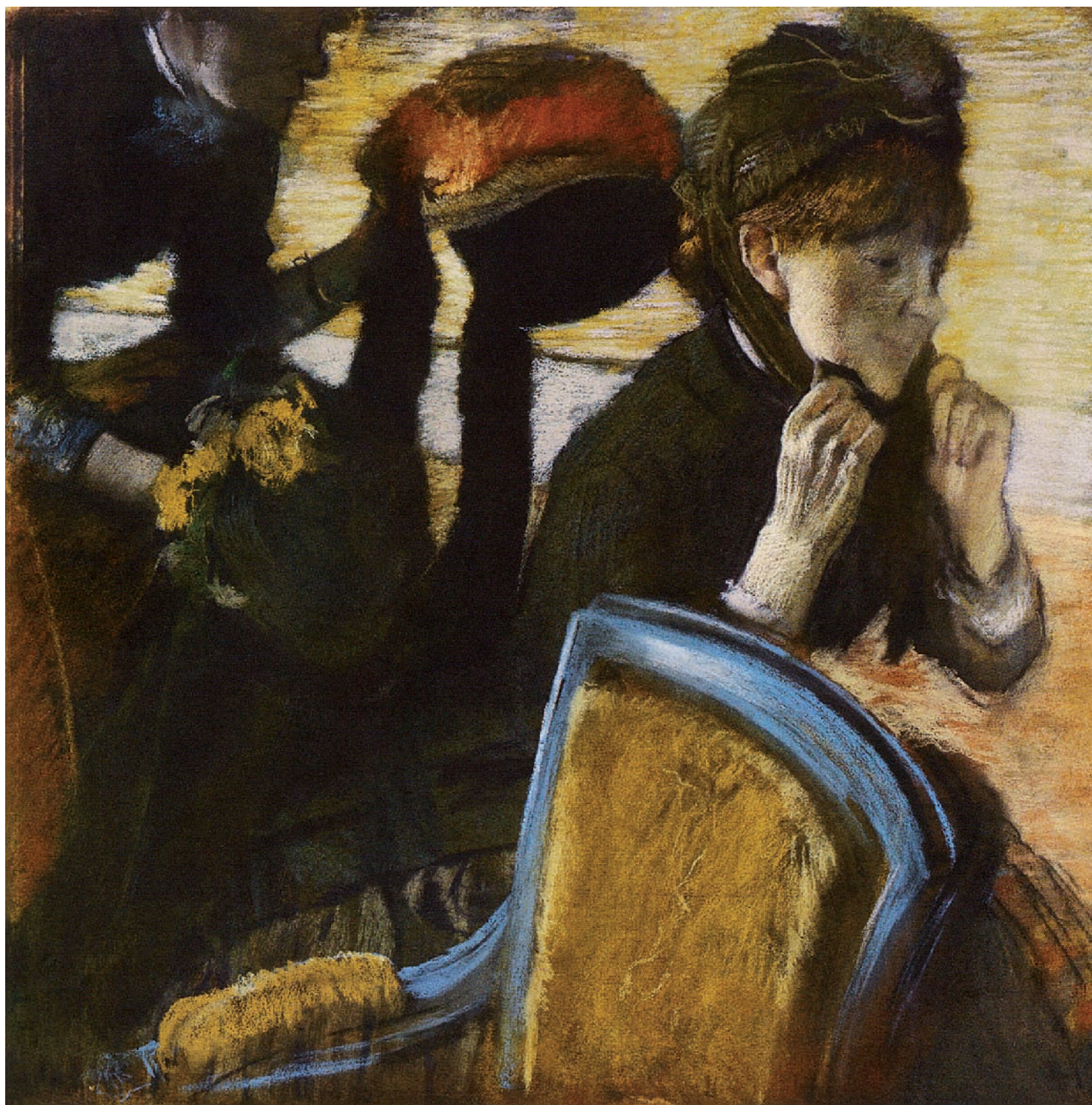
We shall eat it for supper on Sunday, my dear friend, myself and some others who admire the opera and who understand food. I shall try not to eat more than they do, even less.

But when are you coming back? I ask you that and I forget that you love the fields, that you are an amateur of gardens and that it is there that I shall go one day to place a Wagnerian slab above your head. So I am the bear, lightly ruling modern sculpture, more habitually sucking the honey of the Hymettus in the Opera Sigurd. I saw it again, this Sigurd, and just missed seeing Reyer again at the Brasserie Mûllet, to the right of the monument. Divine Mme Caron, I compared her, speaking to her in person, with the figures of Puvis de Chavannes which were unknown to her. Rhythm, rhythm, may your excellent wife give it back to me one of these days in front of infamous Reyer, the master of his score!

The pumpkin was delicately outlined, was it not? Ah! If one could only draw a noble fountain like that with rounded shoulders. For lack of adults who do not want to let themselves be seen (Sabine), there are children built like that.

I wrote a note to your sister-in-law. Give her my kindest regards once more. Sincere greetings to both of you. You could write to me about something other than vegetables, it would give me great pleasure, too.

Sincerely yours,
Degas







To Ludovic Halévy

Tuesday, Sept. 1885

Here, in three envelopes, my dear friend, are the photographs for the young and beautiful Sickert. To avoid going to the post office, I invented this method without difficulty. That does not prevent Whistler from seeing one. What do I hear? That you are going to write an analysis of the lecture, translated by Louise, in the *Hébrard of the Temps*. If it is done seriously I shall laugh academically. If you are introducing the 'Ten O'clock' then it is irony, it is contempt of the arts by the people of the world in full dress, it is happiness. The man in the cap leaves you the choice between the two styles – what does he want; for himself, it is quite simple. He wants you to talk about it with him.

Yesterday the man of taste at Sigurd. He is to deliver a fresh lot of groups to me. Normandy handkerchiefs cost 15 francs at Rouen. We made them rise in price. The pelisses are going to be at top prices. I have stood firm until now and have not given mine. But for my promise to Louise I really think I should have been despoiled.

This morning your Blanche sends me his group with Dinah, accompanied by a charming message. He is reserving me a Dinah alone. He has resumed his sittings with the little Carracciolo. And I envy him. What a change for me, what a pleasure it would be for me to draw such grace.

The arms of Mme Caron are still there. How well she is able to raise her thin and divine arms, holding them aloft for a long time, without affectation, for a long time and then lowering them gently! If you see them again you will cry out: Rachel, Rachel, just as I do, whose taste you despise as well as the deep understanding of the human heart and the human body. That is all.

On the whole Barnes is scarcely unhappy any more.

Are my dear little companions well? Give them my most affectionate greetings, also to the Sickerts. Come back. Your sons are growing into very charming boys. I look at their portrait, at the one of their mother and at the one of their father with a sort of affection. My regards to everyone too, including Mme Ingres.

Germain



To Ludovic Halévy

Wednesday, Sept. 1883

The silver frame delicately chased was a bargain. You did not know that, nor that the object cost only 1,100 francs. Does she know it, she Madame Merante? Moreover, were she to know it she would say: it is a bargain, it is true, it cost less, but after all, me, I am gaining by the bargain! You wrote thus in the days when, without being an academician, you thought and wrote like Madame Cardinal!

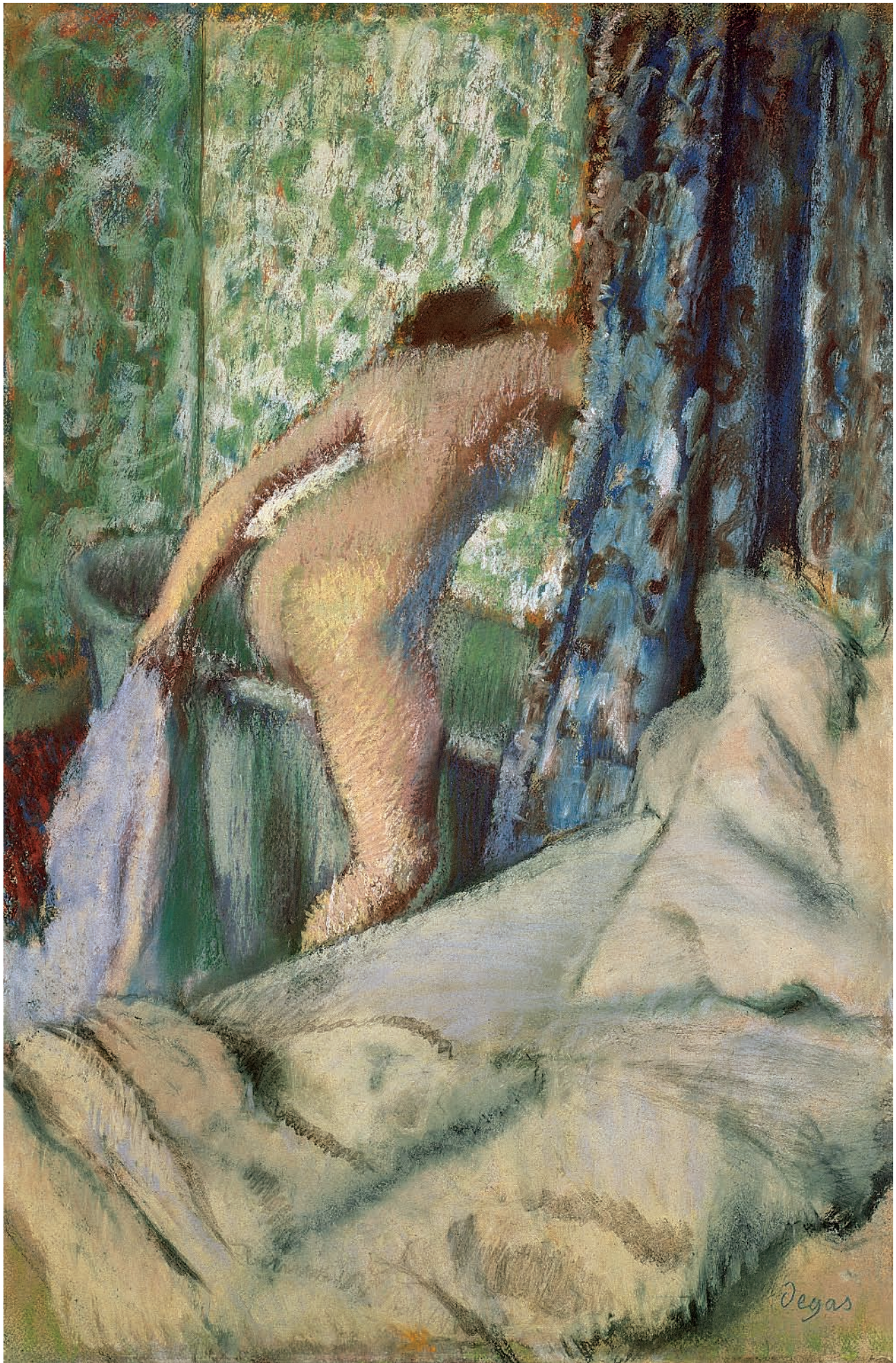
Thank you very much, my dear friend, for the proofs that Cave brought me! When you have others I shall receive them with pleasure. Have you managed to compose for Barnes an apotheosis on Rivers Wilson with Duchess, and several Polonaises? I know that all of the Blerzy servants were to have posed. Gervex also told me, told us (for Cave was there one evening of Sigurd) about the departure of Dr Blanche with the duchess; the scene of the duchess in English, the English translated for you by the painter Jacques, Mme Blanche at the door of the carriage, more preoccupied with her husband's gallantries than with her sensible son, indignant at this supervision etc., etc.

It would have been better to have grouped my three muses and my two choir children against a white or light background. The attire of the ladies in particular is lost. It would also have been better to compress the people more closely together.

My regards to everyone. What lovely weather today, for Arques, for Varengeville with my dear walking companions. Cave brought some touching messages from them. And the Sickerts.

October is approaching and we shall see each other again.

Greetings,
Degas







To Ludovic Halévy

Naples
7 Jan. 1886

My Dear Halévy,

Had you not been elected member of the Academie Française you would not have had to devote a whole term to writing the speech you will have the pleasure of reading to a select audience during my absence, and (I am sure, I don't know why, of what I am putting forwards) you would be in Naples with me, preferably at Rebouveau; at Naples, for my benefit, you would have unfolded all the qualities of the lawyer which all the world recognises in you. And you yourself, such a good judge of everything that is not art, you recognise it first of all. Can you picture me, without you, deprived of that polished lucidity of yours, conversing in Italian with the ancient advocate (a lawyer being the advocate) of my unhappy family! This man, really a man of confidence, explained everything to me with such perfect simplicity that I understood absolutely nothing but what I already knew. The presence of an academician, as well versed as himself on all kinds of subjects, would have struck him very forcibly. And during all that time I should have served as an unintelligent interpreter, which is my real profession in this country.

I am in joint-tenancy with my cousin Lucie, a minor and very nearly of age. Both of us are interested in breaking it up. She because she is of an age to get married and her fortune might suffer from my continued presence here; I because it is my wish to leave behind the name of a good painter in France rather than of a small landowner in Italy, whilst all the same obtaining a small sum of money. So I have to see that my share is purchased at as high a price as possible. You would be wonderful in an affair of this kind. Write to me at once, between two visits to Doucet, giving me some wise counsel. I like questioning people who know what I do not know, Louise and you have always noticed it.

If I slipped quickly away from Paris it is because I was a little rushed at the last minute. Two hours before leaving Sabine I did not even know the times of the Geneva express, and it was Mme Howland who sent to her Swiss neighbour to find out. My regards to everyone. In a fortnight you will see me again. Give me news of Rose Lemoine and our friends Gounod prevented you from seeing Mme Weldon, I already know that. Tell Mme Howland that I should like to know some other things.



I happened to get from Mr d'Ideville a rather exaggerated note of introduction to the consul general at Naples, Mr du Tour, whom you must know, and who is, I believe, particularly friendly with Meilhac and as a result with Rebouleau, who was with Meilhac (like Lippmann). I went to see my consul and he recommended a lawyer here. Tell Meilhac, if he writes to Mr du Tour to thank him for the gracious way he received me, in spite of the ironically exaggerated introduction of Mr d'Ideville.

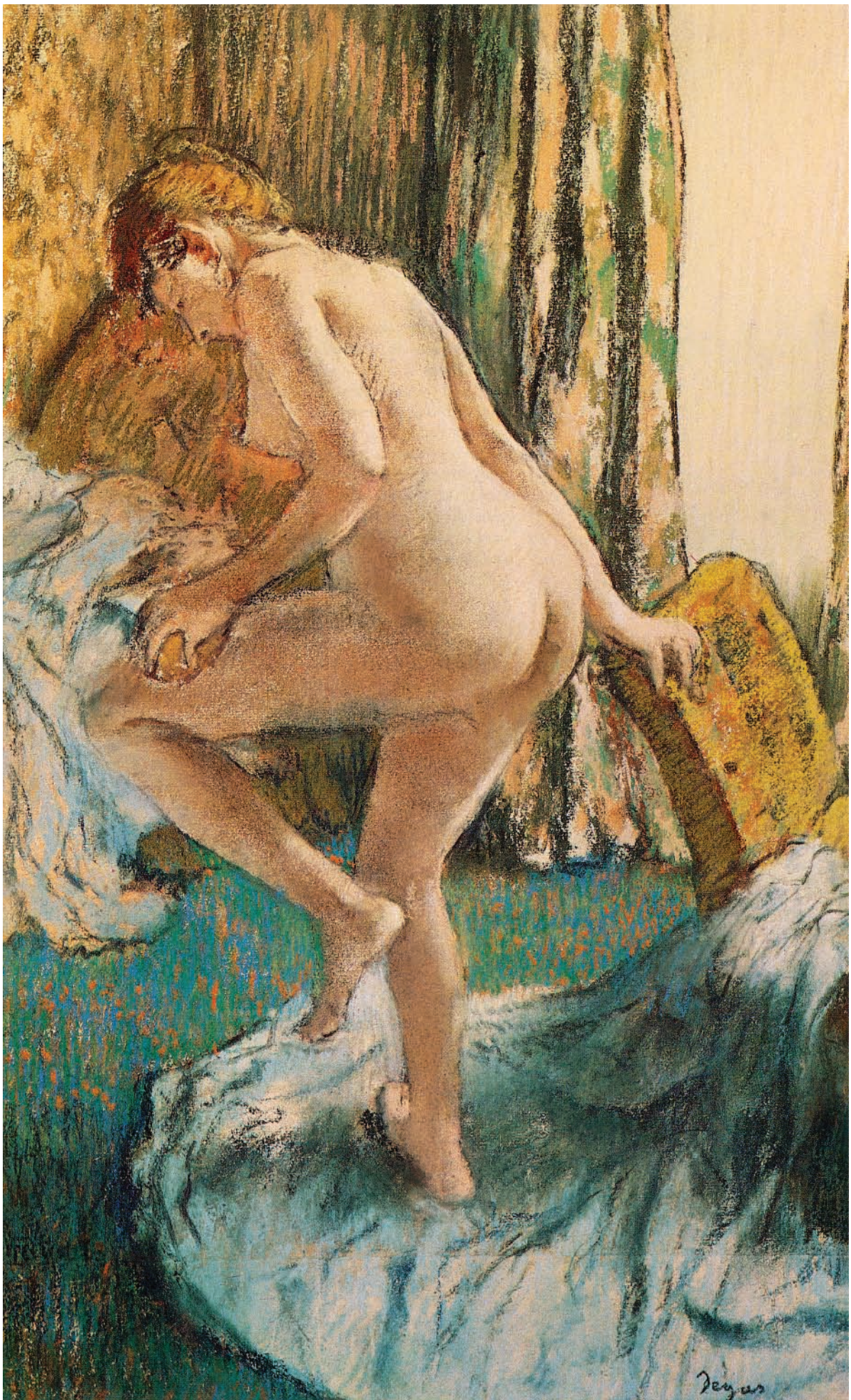
Sigurd is officer of the legion of honour! Will he remain on the repertoire because of that? You alone can guess.

There are not so many distinctive handkerchiefs here as I had hoped, it is necessary to go into the country. I should like to have nothing else to do.

And now your lecture with all the little points that you will have prepared so religiously quite alone or in the presence of Cave or in the presence of Doucet himself. I have just written a lot, I am tired, I have nothing more to say. I now wish to get letters from France showing the interest that is, I think, my present due.

But I must not forget to tell you that Sickert signalled my arrival in Naples to the Richmond family from Australia, one of whose daughter's profile appears in Barnes' watch at Dieppe; that he begged me with his well known charm to go and see a delightful person to whom he had taught the art of handling me; and that I went. It is very easy to go to Pausilippe by tram, to visit a young Australian in a bourgeois, Anglo-Italian boarding house in a wise, bewitching country. So I did it and I shall inform Sickert who will be touched. They examined me, holding a photograph of Sickert and myself, taken by Barnes at Dieppe. They really seemed to think I was better than on the paper, I tell you. Write to me.

Calata Trinita Maggiore, Napoli. Italia.







To Bartholomé

Naples
17 Jan. 1886

Today, Sunday, I was to have gone to Pouzzoles on the Lac Fusaro, to Baia etc. to do a tour, my dear friend, to see what I had never seen in my journeys to Naples! It is raining and I am writing, which is not in any way disagreeable seeing it is to you that I am writing. Your wife, recognising my handwriting, will open this one too whilst you are busy with the commissions you do so well. We shall see each other again, I am coming back soon, I have no strength to negotiate such a matter and my point insisted on here is nothing but a simple landlords pilgrimage. You thought my letter very sad, and to a certain extent you are right. Interest and sentiment struggle within me in a strange way and I can but ill defend myself on these two points. I also have a horrible fear of lawyers or advocates. But who else could do the estimates? I am copying and translating so many deeds and contracts, so many papers, and one day I shall arrive in Paris with all the papers and fall into the arms of a Rouart or any other friend well versed in the questions I need. In the spring I shall return to Naples better equipped. That seems to me to be the best thing. Only I have just wasted one month which could have been less painful.

They are not forgetting me in Paris, you are not the only one to write me, my good friend. But no one writes better or more affectionately than you do, not even the women. Young Jacques has been introduced to Mme Rowland and his load of gossip will succeed there. *Nil humanum* must be unbearable. I am speaking of other times, for with the exception of the heart, it seems to me that everything within me is growing old in proportion. And even this heart of mine has something artificial. The dancers have sewn it into a bag of pink satin, slightly faded pink satin, like their dancing shoes.

I am anxious to see your picture. How pretty is the photographed drawing you gave me! But it is essential to do the same subject over again, ten times, a hundred times. Nothing in art must seem to be chance, not even movement.



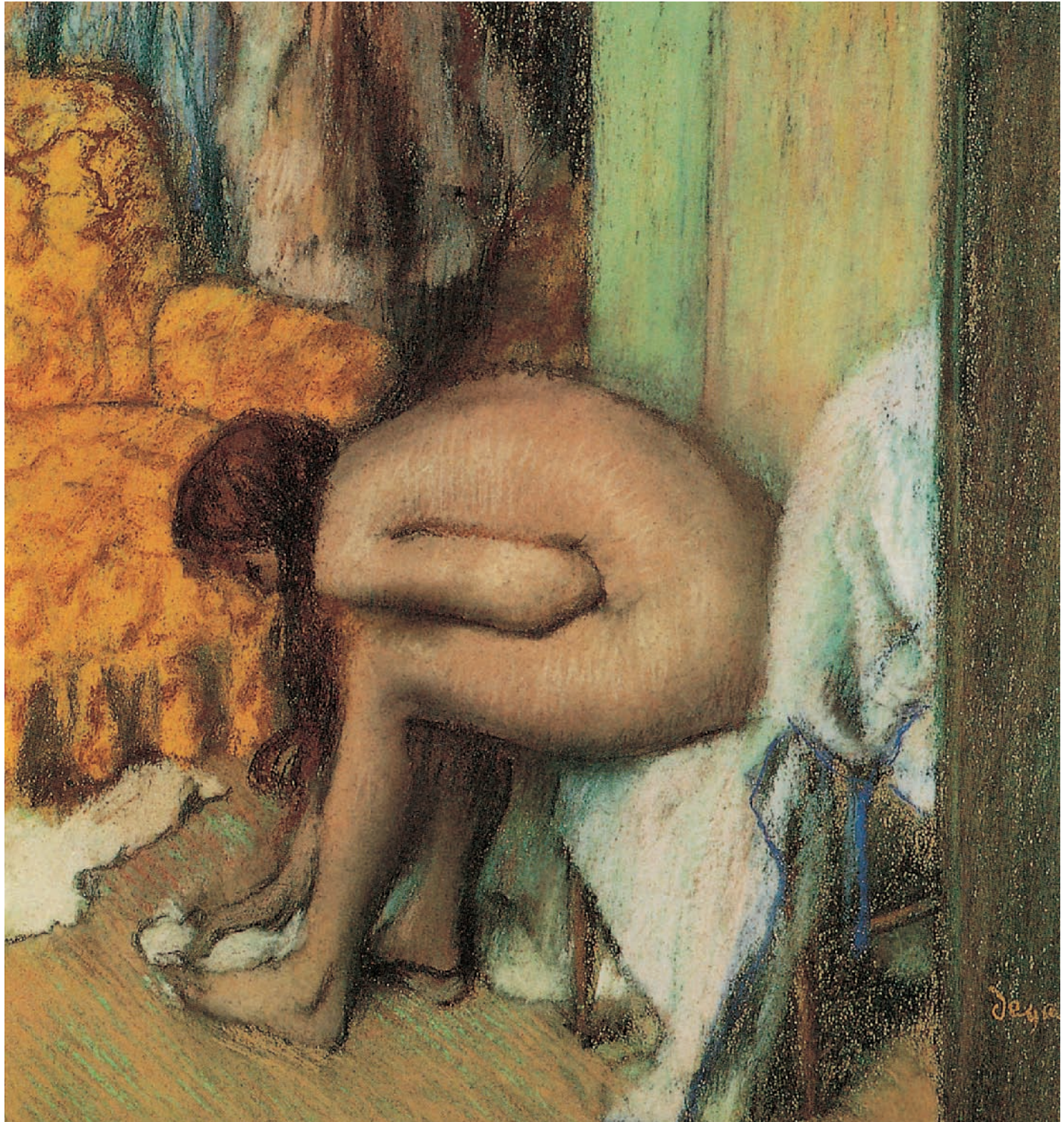
To Henri Rouart

Paris
Thursday, 1886

Your sad yet good letter did not need to be sent. I am still in Paris, my dear friend.

In about a week's time I may go and spend a short time with my old bourgeois of the Orne, and I need to do so more for the sake of my eyes than of my mind. It is not too bad in town if one likes it. And, deep down, you know quite well I do rather like it.

One must continue to look at everything, the small and the large boats, the stir of people on the water and on land too. It is the movement of people and things that distracts and even consoles if there is still consolation to be had for one so unhappy. If the leaves of the trees did not move, how sad the trees would be and us as well! There is a tree in the garden of the neighbouring house which moves at each breath of wind. Well, its all very well, my being in Paris, in my almost dirty studio; I say to myself that this tree is delightful.







To Faure

Thursday morning, 16 June 1886

My dear Monsieur Faure,

I receive your friendly summons and am going to start right away on your Courses. Will you come here towards the end of next week to see how it is progressing? The unfortunate thing is that I shall have to go and see some real racing again and I do not know if there will be any after the Grand Prix.

If it is finished, I shall set to work on the *Blanchisseuse*.

In any case you will be able to see something of your own next Saturday, 24 June, between 3 and 6 o'clock.

Kind regards,
Degas

To Faure

Friday evening, 2 July 1886

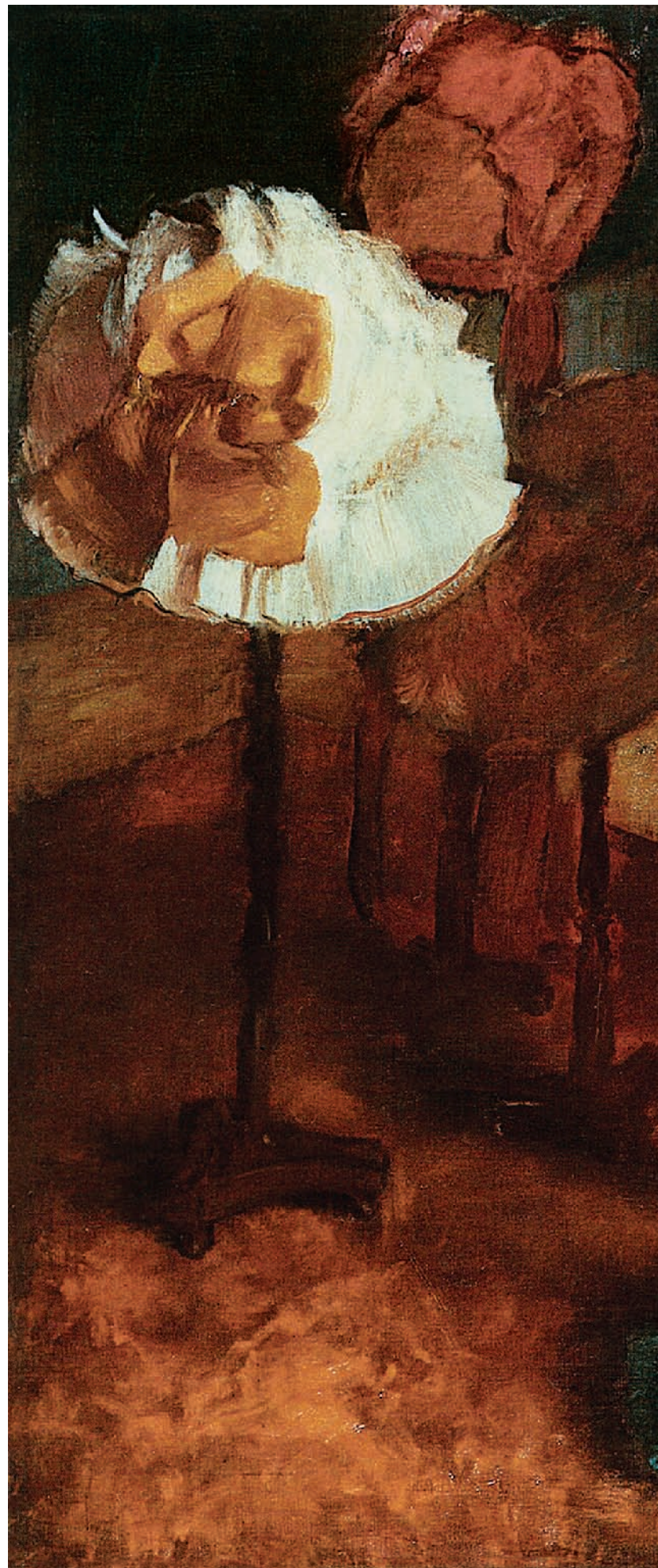
My dear Monsieur Faure,

I shall need a few more days to finish your big picture of the Races. I have taken it up again and I am working on it.

A rather nasty trick has been played on me, and just monopolised me for eight days on something other than your things. It was necessary to fix a hole at once. A few days more and you will be satisfied.

Degas

The Millinery Shop, c. 1885.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 110.7 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.







To Faure

2 Jan. 1887

My Dear Monsieur Faure,

The other day I received an open telegram with your request for a reply to your last letter.

It is getting more and more embarrassing for me to be your debtor. And if I do not terminate my debt it is because it is difficult for me to do so. This summer I set to work again on your pictures, particularly the one of the horses, and I had hoped to bring it to an end rapidly. But a certain Mr B. judged it right to leave me saddled with a drawing and a picture that he had ordered from me. In the middle of summer, this net loss overwhelmed me. It was necessary to put aside all the things belonging to you in order to fabricate others which would enable me to live. I can only work for you in my spare moments and they are rare.

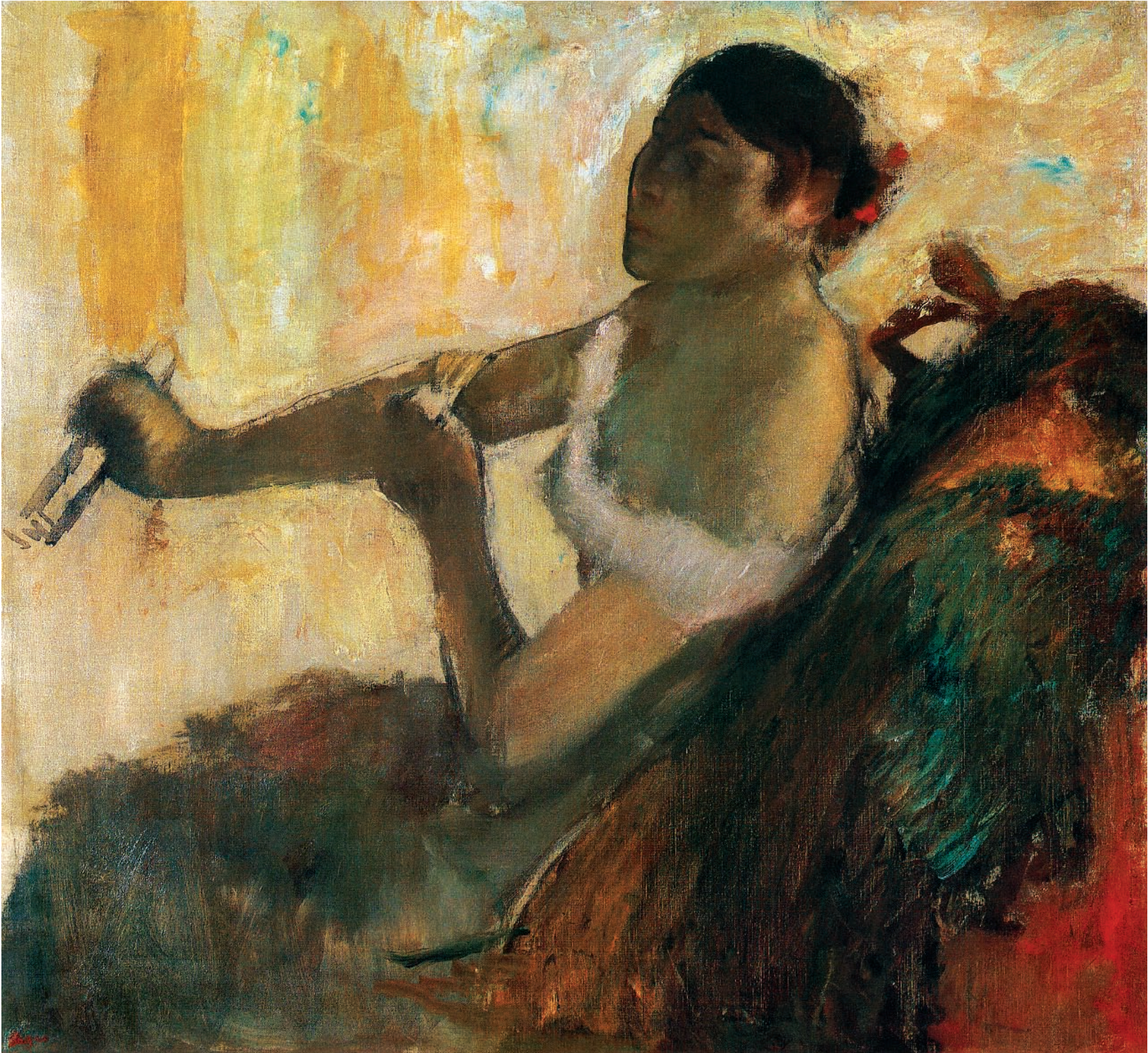
The days are short, little by little they will grow longer, and if I earn a little money I will be able to take up your work. I could enter into longer explanations. The ones I give you are the simplest and most irrefutable.

I beg you, therefore, to have a little more patience, I will soon finish these things which greatly swallow up my time gratuitously. These are things which love and respect for my art forbid me to neglect.

Accept, my dear Monsieur Faure, my sincere regards.

Degas







To Madame Fleury

Tuesday, *Undated*

Dear Madame,

So I replied neither to your kind letter nor to the expectation that your poor protégé was inflicting on me. What he showed me is of no interest and my collection of Gavarni could gain nothing from it.

So your poor sister-in-law is ill again and in view of what I saw the other day and of what Mlle Cassatt told me this morning she is not doing well. Poor woman, poor man! My hard heart melts all the same. They are very unhappy both of them.

When shall I have the pleasure of seeing you?

I too often shut myself in my studio. I do not see the people I love often enough and I shall end up suffering for it.

I grasp your hand.

Your friend,
Degas



To Bartholomé

Sunday morning, 1888

My Dear Friend,

We will dine with you on Monday which is better than Wednesday. We will be there early to see the Christ. Happy sculptor! I, too, should like to sculpt but I have not done enough horses. The women must wait, I will return to them later.

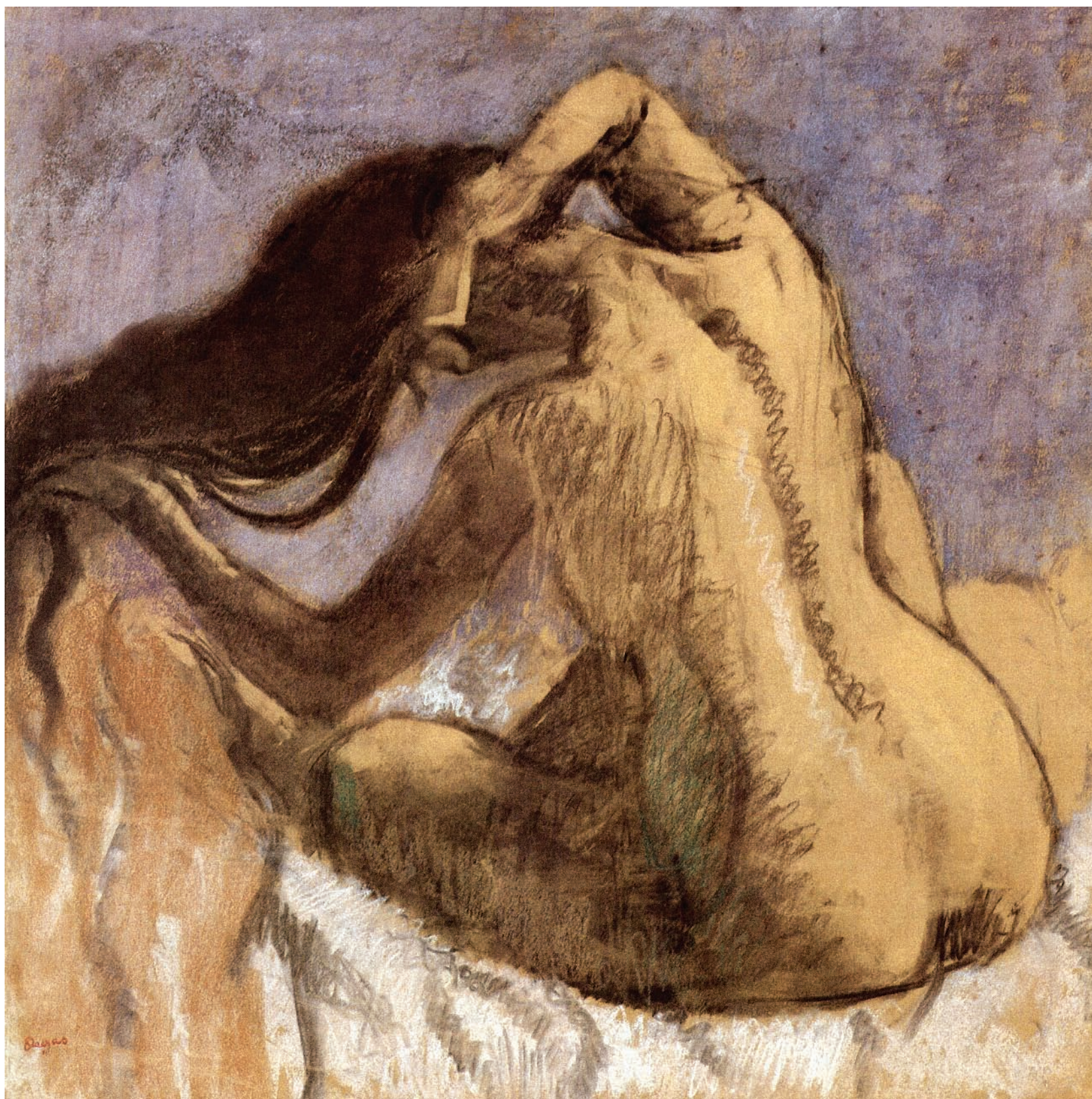
Regards,
Degas

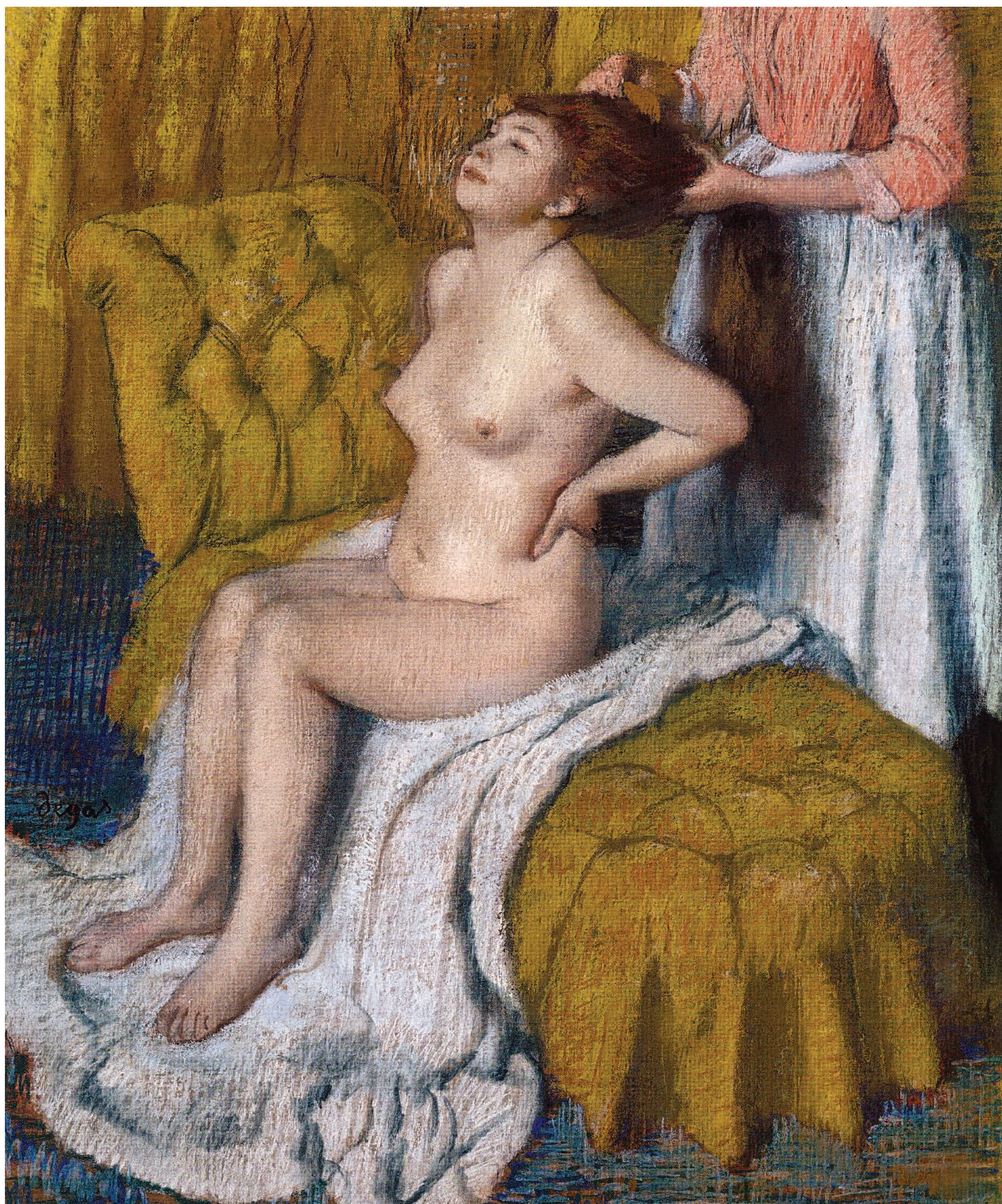
To Bartholomé

Friday, *Undated*

My dear friend and perhaps caster, I want to tell you you that tomorrow, Saturday, there is an exhibition of Ingres drawings, a special exhibition. If you wish to go there come to the Studio at 12 o'clock, 12.30 or to the little Vefour until 1:30. I shall have a ticket, we can go together. In front of these marvels of the human mind, we will think of Raffaëlli without speaking of him otherwise.

Regards,
Degas







To Henri Rouart

Friday, 1888

My dear friend, you are leaving Le Mans and I shall not have been there. Tell the colonel, the general even, seeing that at this moment they are one and the same person, that I am preparing for the school of Cauterets. Tillot must have written to you that poor Mlle Cassatt had a fall from her horse, broke the tibia of her right leg and dislocated her left shoulder. I met him two days later and told him the story; he was to have written to you the same evening. She is going on well, and she is here for a long time to come, firstly immobilised for many long summer weeks and then deprived of her active life and perhaps also of her passion for riding.

The horse must have put its foot in a hole made by the rain on soft earth.

I wager you never thought of asking if anyone at Le Mans owned a copy of *Thousand and One Nights*? What delightful moments you would have spent, perhaps as delightful as mine.

Tomorrow I shall be in attendance at Crépy-en-Valois, for the erection of Bartholomé's Christ, but I am returning in the evening. The examination for Cauterets is hard.

I am eager to see you again, a new man through camp life in a room, enriched by some young and firm and restrained aquarelles.

Tillot, secretary of the Barye exhibition, complains of being a sinecurist. He has nothing but our admiration in his cash box.

Greetings to the general, colonel *malgré lui*. Au revoir.



To Ludovic Halévy

Hotel d'Angleterre, Cauterets
6 Sept. 1888

My Dear Halévy,

I am writing to you out of boredom and to tell you absolutely nothing at all. And I am using the familiar form of address for the sake of intimacy in order to diminish the distance that separates us, perhaps also from a feeling of friendship. My congratulations on Elie's success for you, Elie himself, his mother, and Daniel, too.

To where have they deported me? I take immense care to drink according to the orders of Evariste Michel. I am hardly enjoying myself, all alone as I am and reading little. All this instead of shutting myself up no matter where and chewing arabic gum of the finest quality, as you so wisely repeated to me!

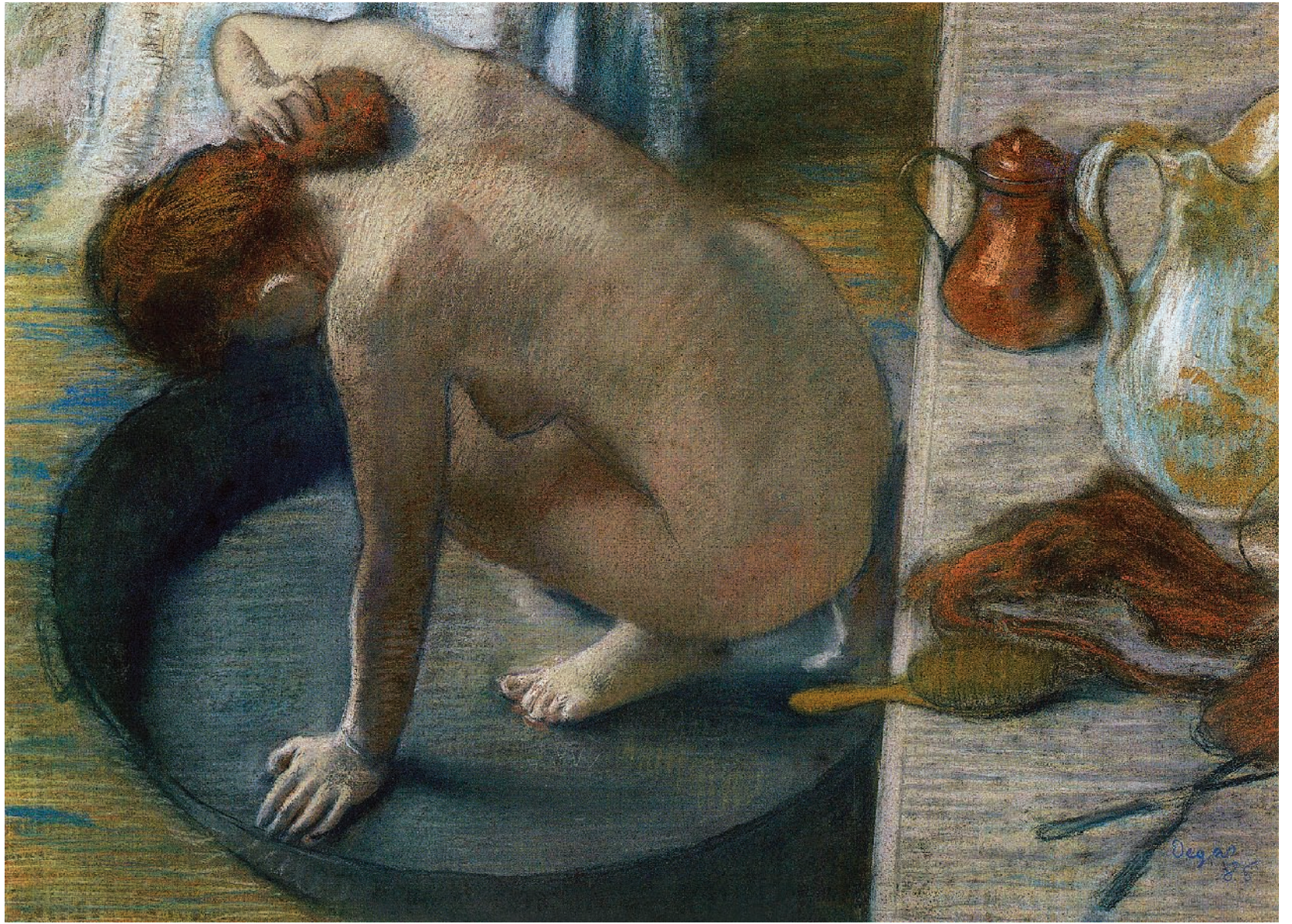
Madame de Mailly is here in person. She is leaving tomorrow. I sent her my Turkish respects by way of a certain Russian whose acquaintance I made here through the act of a general of the artillery, that goes without saying. But with my discretion, I made no effort to join her, fearing her ill-temper and above all what is called her beauty. Yesterday I met her in front of the new Cesar (Rocher and Rieumiset combined). She was most gracious, she asked me if I were writing to you and sends all her friendly wishes for you and Louise. But during this speech I was looking at her and I thought her strangely thin and changed.

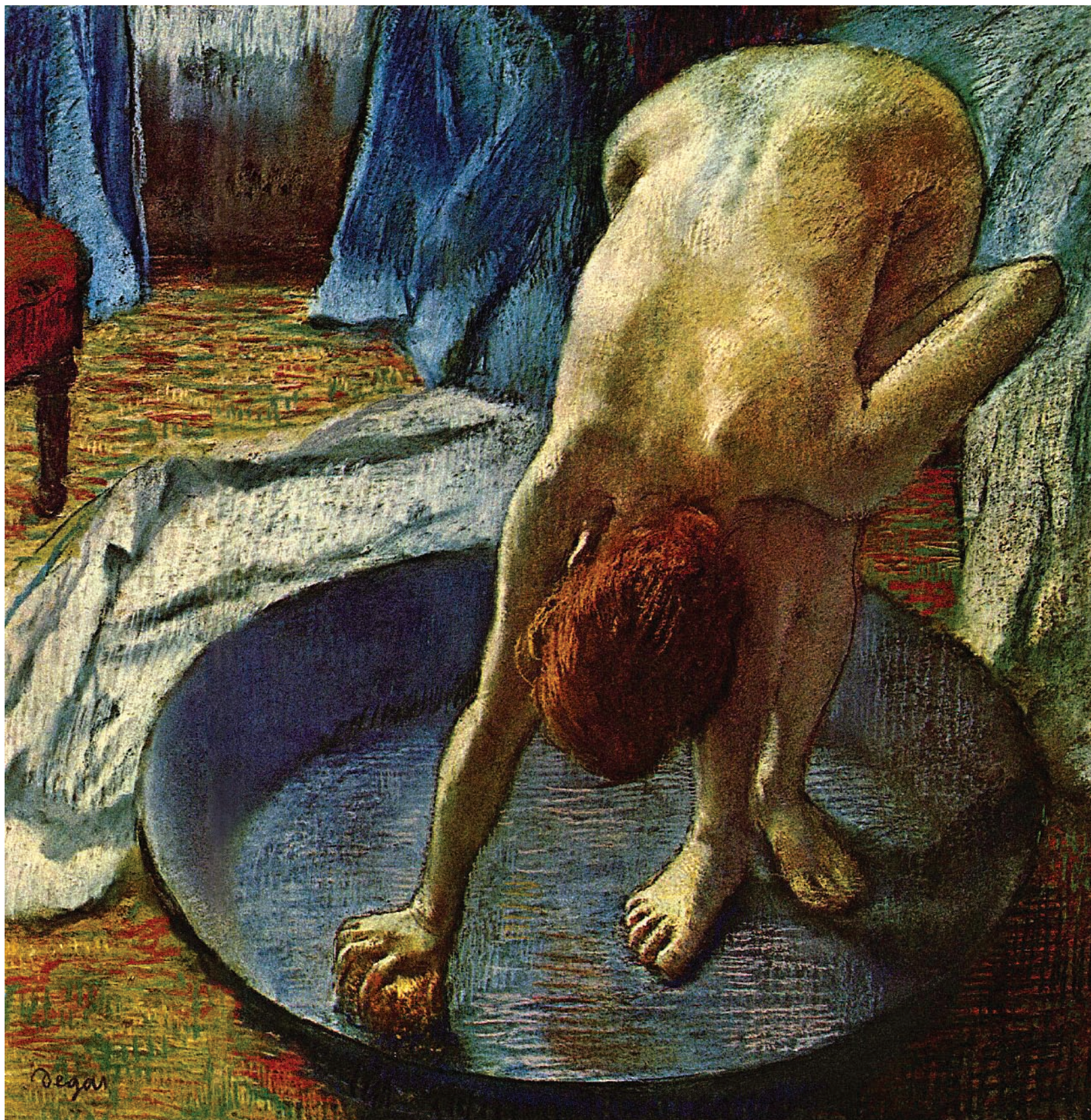
I must tell you about a certain Punch who is the only noble minded distraction that I have here! Can you imagine a piece, disunited and often improved by the interruptions and the demands of the children, more cruel, more fierce, more logical than himself, Punch? There was (she has left now) a little girl who was a great trial to Punch in the pursuit of his business. She directed the play. The man from Auvergne yielded too.

Write me a line, my dear friend, to distract me, to instruct me, and to please me.

Greetings to Louise and to the two young men.

Degas







To Bartholomé

Cauterets
9 Sept.

I hear him, I see him, all red with anger, saying the famous 'Women think they can do everything', which he will please have the goodness to repeat at my injunction. I continue to thank you for your good letters, my dear friend, and when I recognise them on the green baize cloth in the hotel office I know I am about to spend a pleasant moment. But, for all that, they are not going to release me before the 15th, still the whole week to spend; it is high time I was liberated, it really is a bit hard. Lafond came the other day to surprise me, and what struck him most in me as persisting through all the bad treatments, my magesterial air.

Why do you go out mainly at night like a Wandering Jew? To put me off perhaps? All the same I regretted very much not being with you instead of being at no. 132 of this asylum. My own cross is laid on a table and I swear to you the two ruffians, though they have the faces of advocates or landlords, do not speak to me, do not confide their affairs to me, so wicked is my face. Finally, this is the end, I shall go no more to Cauterets deprived of all human aid!

I had at last written to Mr de Fleury, a word of congratulation on his book. He replied at once with a very affectionate letter.

How can one look after oneself for anything so sensitive as the respiratory channels, style admitted, in a country where the weather changes every instant? Yesterday I could hardly talk. I caught cold in the fog and the rain and I already saw myself interned and ill in these parts. Foot baths at Cesar, monkshood, and Dr Franck's health grains were prescribed and carried out. Evariste Michel thinks it will be nothing, I have just seen him again this minute. The *Thousand and One Nights* calm me, instruct me, and raise me to the heights of wisdom. Read the story of Cogja Hassan the ropemaker. It is the book of Job.

Come on, you could easily write me once more, I well deserve it. When writing to Mlle Cassatt, 16 rue d'Avon at Fontainebleau, I could not resist telling her of the humiliation of our Raffaëlli by the Hottentote lady. She replied and, amongst other things, she tells me that, whilst riding in the forest and having got lost among the rocks, her mare shied and she thought she saw a small animal moving in the grass and at home again she saw her steed's leg already swollen. It was a viper. It appears that a viper is healthier for animals than it is for us and that it does not kill them.

It is Paris-Lyon-Marseille that kills. Never will they understand derailing will they? They are all from the school but only Captain Baschet, who must be from there, understood. He said at once 'I am lost, goodbye.' Should one be satisfied with statistics and say, as certain people do, that there are fewer deaths on the railways than on stage coaches or else should one impose enormous fines on the big railway companies? My head is not strong enough at the moment to decide.



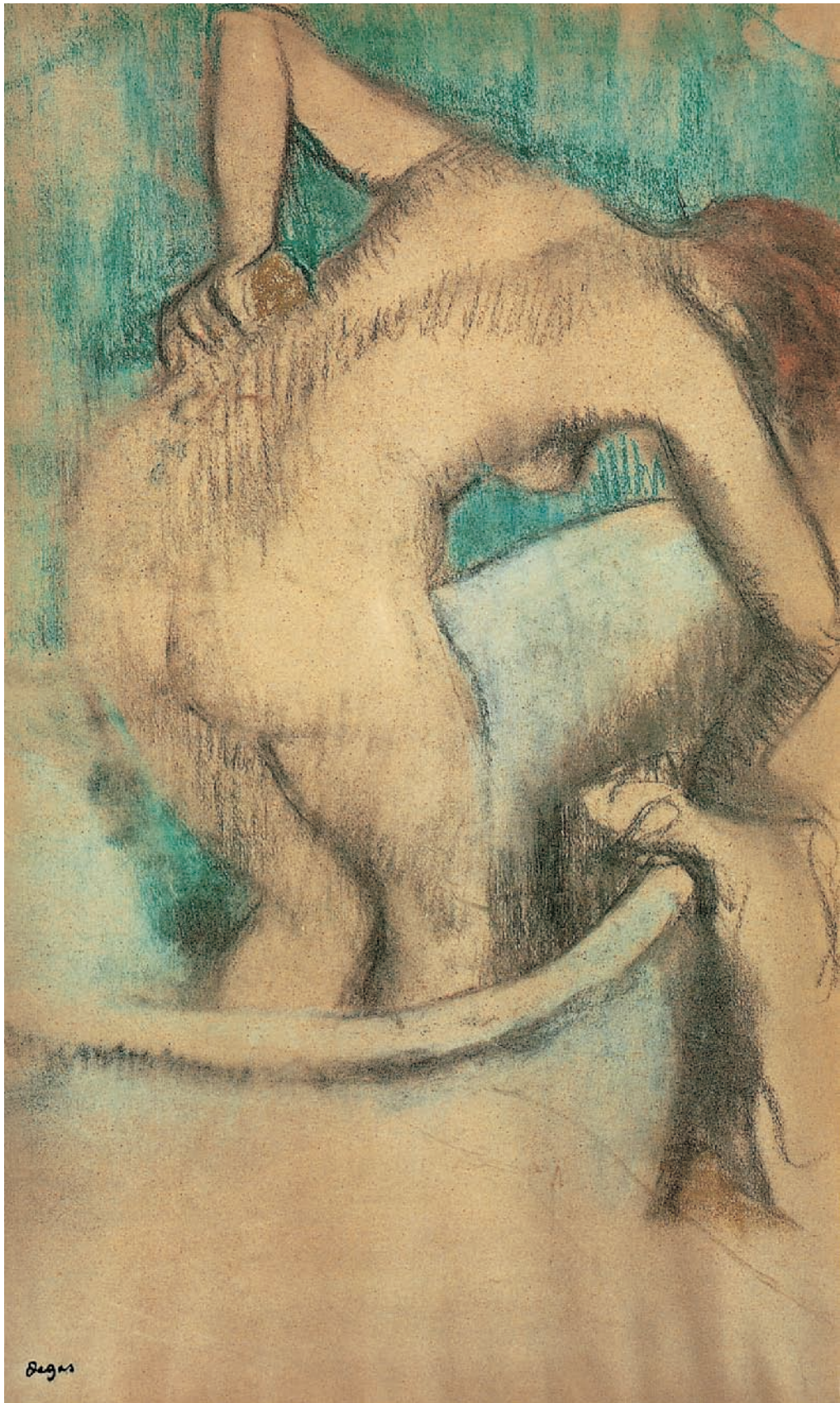
I will tell you some things about Punch. It is too long. And then, with the cold I have caught and the cold outside I shall have to stay in the hotel in the evenings. And he himself, my poor friend, he too will have to leave for lack of children to catch cold on his benches.

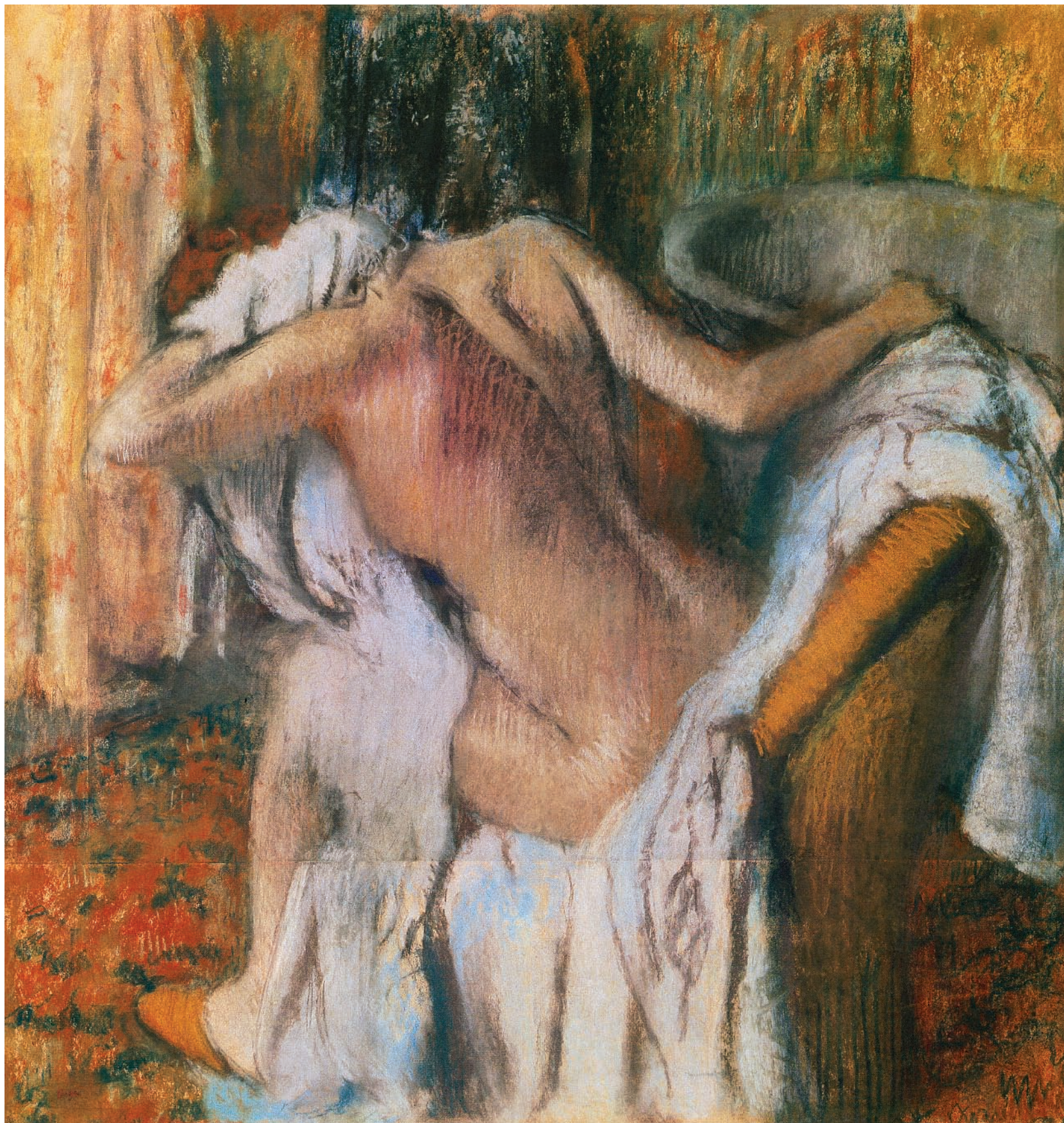
Should I have done the masterly drawing of the mountains? I would have died, so you will not regret it, neither shall I.

They were seen at Montmartre, in Sweden
(Twice) To the North, to the South and then elsewhere
Lud. Halévy and?
The children asked their mothers
(Twice) Oh, who are these two travellers.

There is no more time to write to Clermont. Evariste Michel must write to him himself.
Shall I tell you something that I am very much afraid of? That I shall find the Christ finished. Greetings to Fleury and to the Venetian.

Sincerely yours,
Degas







To Bartholomé

Wednesday, 14 Aug. 1889

The hotel de France is, according to Lafond, the good hotel. He has just left for Pau an hour ago ...

Mme Alexis Rouart is at the hotel d'Angleterre with her niece and I for my part am in no. 11, very beautiful room with balcony and two windows. Extremely simple society, aristocracy from the provinces, right-minded people, a few signs of the cross before eating the soup. No one asked me my profession. Can it be that I look it? See here, Bartholomé, do not deceive me.

I had to give Cherfils the slip and Bagnères-de-Bigarre. It will be difficult to escape him on my return, at Pau, after 3 days of friendship. And yet it is necessary to start work again and the fortune that Manzi places at my feet, as a carpet.

Speaking of old goats, we have here the Baronne de P, walking just now with Mme d'A., a discarded one of Haas. If he himself were to arrive unexpectedly, what new focus in my good hotel!

Apart from Bas Relief itself, should sculpture not be the unique art to give the idea of forms which all the same are deceptive in the relief? It is the relief that spoils everything, that is most deceptive, and yet it is in that that everyone believes. This will take me a long way.



To Boldinivii

Cauterets
Thursday, Aug. 1889

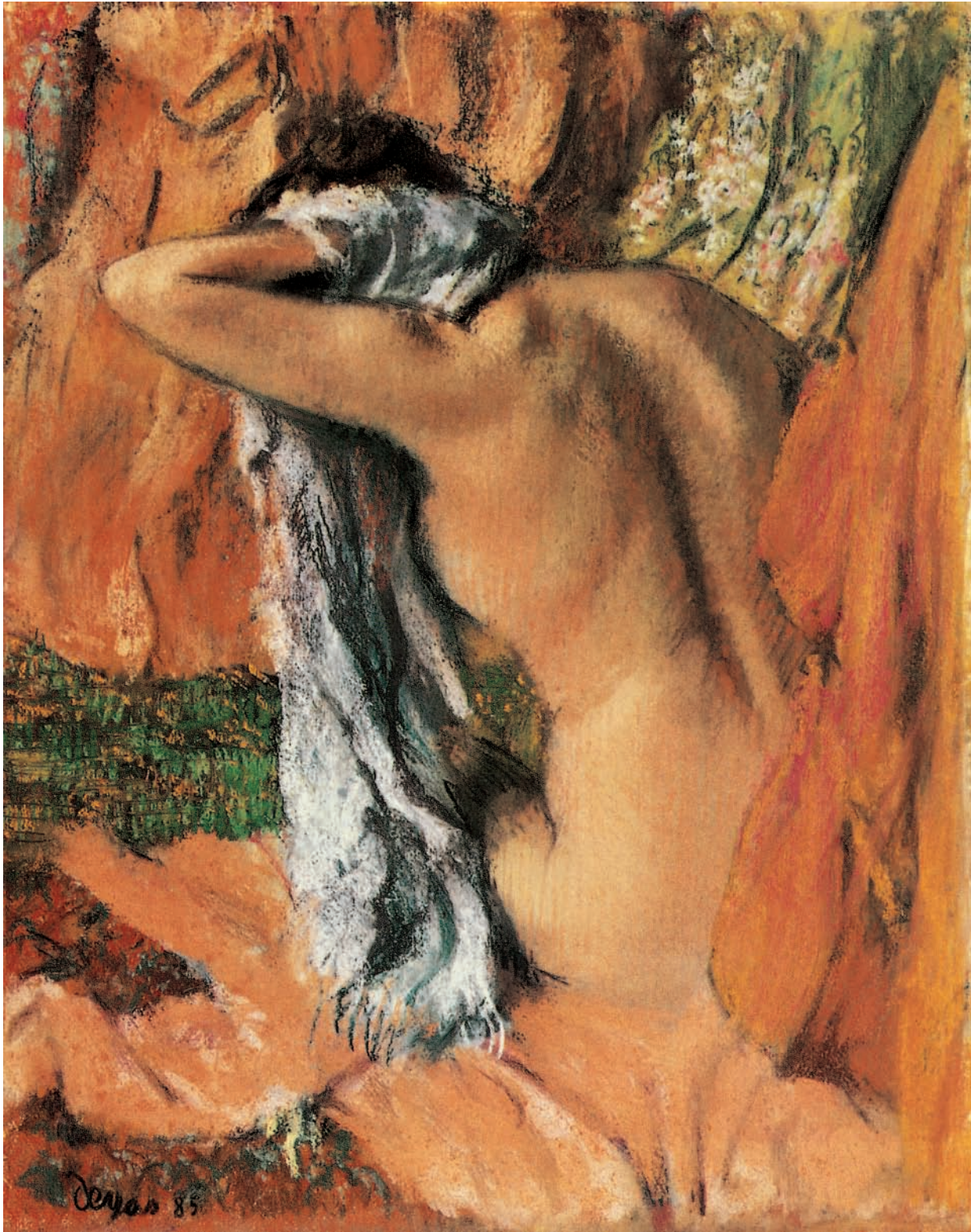
I have just this moment received your excellent telegram, my dear companion, and everything seems to me to be going well. From Pau where I shall be on the 2 and shall stay the 3, 4, and 5, I shall give you instructions, after having talked to my friends Cherfils, great experts on journeys to Spain. Lafond, whose advice is so precious, will be absent from the secret session. He left for Touraine yesterday, Wednesday, with plans of his own that we shall never know. The weather is very fine and hot in the mountains. We shall, without the slightest doubt, be roasted in the planes of Castille, but the museums are always brisk. I am stuffing myself with Spanish ideas by reading the guide, the Journey of de Amicis, and a handbook of bullfighting that Lafond sent me this morning.

You will receive the information at 41, boulevard Berthier on Wednesday or Thursday. By your leaving Paris on Thursday evening and my leaving Pau on Friday morning we could meet at Bayonne at 10:48 and set off immediately for Spain without any wait in Bonnat's country. And that through your having taken the 8:20 train in the evening, as it would appear from your wire to be your intention to do. But wait for a letter from Pau regarding the tickets to take.

During your interim stay in Paris try to go and visit Bartholomé and ask him if he has any observation mission to confide to us.

See you soon,
Degas







To Boldini

Hotel de France, Cauterets
Sunday, Aug. 1889

My Dear Boldini,

You insisted on being warned, you are. The journey to Madrid will take place about 5 September. My treatment ends on Monday, 2 September. The Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday I shall spend at Pau and on the evening of the 5th or the morning of the 6th I shall leave Pau to wait for you at Bayonne or Hendaye, that is to say the frontier.

I know you to be modest and incapable of taking advantage of a situation or a title of any kind, President of the Italian jury or any other, to demand special consideration. You will travel incognito, will you not? So get down to it and consult a good railway guide and brood over the advantages of return tickets or circular routes (very little circular). As a matter of fact I shall send you a carefully thought out written itinerary from Pau. But first of all let me know your plans at once. You can write to me here until Sunday, 1 September.

Lafond has been most loyal. He is leaving for La Touraine on Tuesday and will be in Paris towards the 20th. He has engraved the head of his portrait by you. The Verdi is finished and is not bad.

There will still be the possibility of seeing a small bullfight in Madrid. You will complete your education, begun academically on rue Pergolese, etc. etc., if you are really coming.

Hoping to receive your orders (as they say in business), I beg you to receive my sentiments of curiosity.

Degas



To Bartholomé

Cauterets

Monday, 19 Aug. 1889

Henri, Baron d'Ernemon, my neighbour on the left at table, 65 years old, after the departure of his neighbour to the left, has attacked me. All his thoughts, in spite of the enormous pieces of everything and in particular of rocquefort which are hunks, he communicates to me incessantly. And he thinks like Arnal on every subject. I weep over it and he loves to see me weep on account of him. As a matter of fact he names all the people he has known. Such a thing happened to him at his Chateau de Neuilly, near and between Pacy-sur-Eure and whilst talking to Mme de Boisgeline, the younger, Mlle de ... Another thing with a prostitute of Amiens. With it all, this man is a very good looking man, and his broad shoulders have supported a worthless life. He was the intimate friend of Janvier de la Motte, his prefect of course. It is impossible that you do not know, even through Mr de Fleury, what this creature is worth. 'Here is another good one. If you know it, stop me.' One would have to be a policeman to stop him. I come upon him at the corner of the refreshment room and it is always he who attacks first. However, he has tact; he left me after lunch, he reserves me, he knows his audience.

Langlès, the big biscuit manufacturer, the neighbour on the right, certainly has a more solid mentality than the baron. Did I tell you that he lives on avenue Kleber, that he has lost his eldest granddaughter, that he left Paris out of sadness and installed his family in an estate at Pau, he himself having to go to his factory there every winter? And he even went to draw models at the Academy de Colarossi, where Courtois, or Blanc, or Dagnan Bouveret, or Flameng corrected his work. I had to tell him that I was a painter and he was not frightened by it.

I am writing to you, Mr Bartholomé, even though it is 5:30, the hour of the promenade, because it is pouring with rain. I think I deserve one or another of those good letters to amuse me and wait for the end. Madame Howland and her pianist went to see you, I know, and admired and envied your passion for art and for work. And one must say there is some reason for it.

Forain did a drawing of Mme Prudence. You must remember it. I can visualise it but I have forgotten the title. She knows how to make you love the future, does she not, without breathing a word about it? But what is even more simple is the fact that one is in the same boat oneself.

I am still thinking of a journey to Spain and of a real bullfight. Should I get that flashy dago Boldini to come? Lafond, will he follow? Will I myself have the courage not to return to Paris without further exposing my life? Alas! I have still 13 days to go and time not to make a decision.

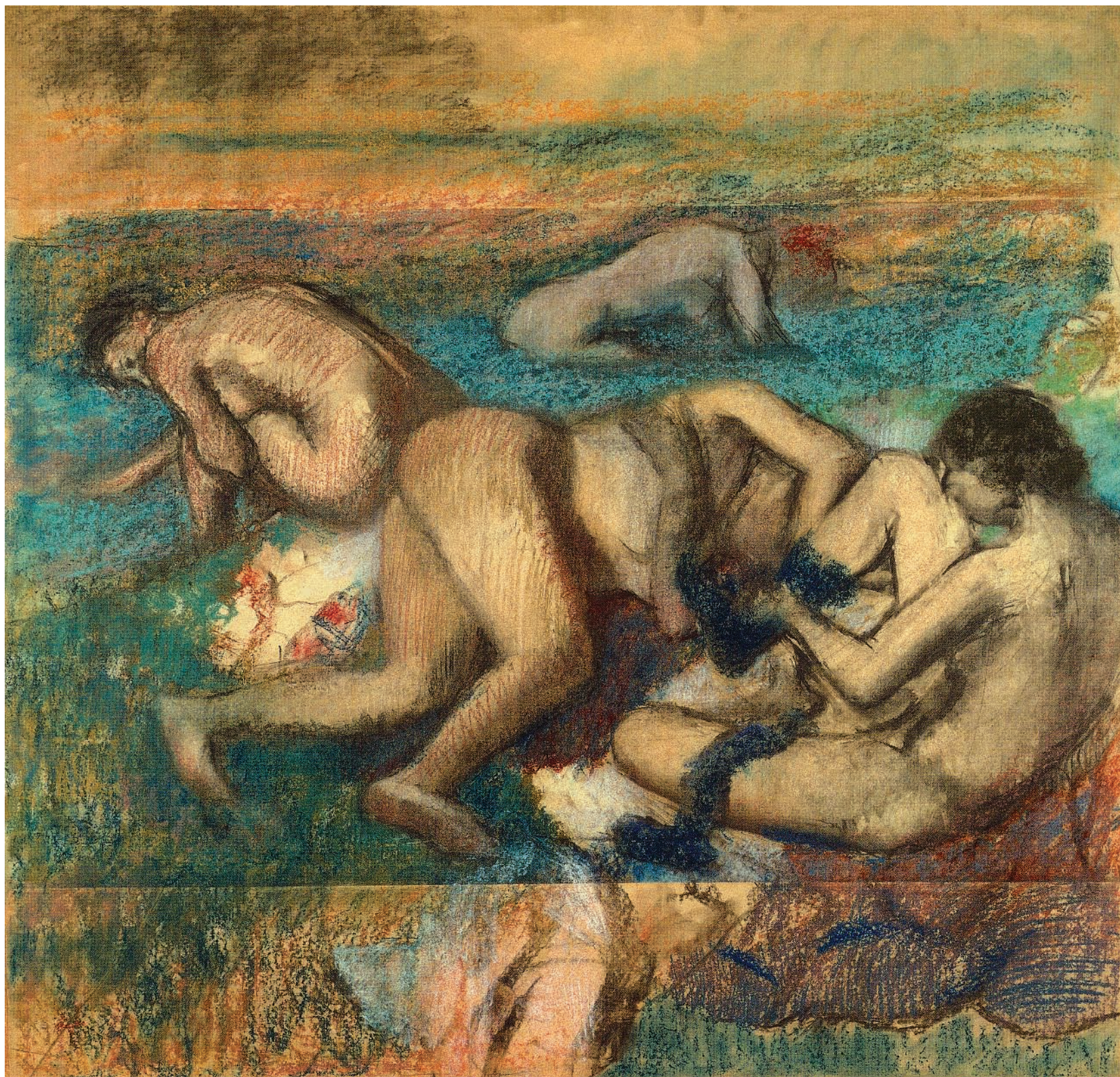
But I almost deprived you of the pleasure of knowing that Haas may arrive in 8 or 10 days, and that the attitude he will take towards me, whether he sees me or cuts me (like a corn in the rue de La Paix) will cost him something or will cost him nothing. He knows that I do not see, and that when I see I am indifferent. Will he have a plan and the courage to carry it out? You know how funny they are with other men, these ladies' men.

Have you ever been to see the water railway at the Invalides with the engineer Manzi, the rich amateur? Try to go there and to tell me about it.

My regards to Fleury (from the sea) and to your Italians. Do not do too much of that sculpture before my arrival. 'Deuced weather,' I said to the baron, followed immediately by: 'I prefer it to the guillotine.'

Sincerely yours,
Degas







To Bartholomé

Hotel de Paris, Madrid
2 o'clock afternoon, Sunday, 8 Sept. 1889

You could write me a line, my dear Bartholomé, to this address for our return from Andalucia. For want of you, whose absence I, and even Boldini, feel to such a degree, that at every moment we say 'if Bartholomé were here, how happy he would be!' you could tell us how your brother is, what possibility there still is for you to join us.

Arrived this morning about 6:30 (you would have liked to arrive at a time that suited you better, for instance 4 o'clock, you would not have been able to). From 9 o'clock until about midday, visit to the museum, back at the hotel and lunch (since we have been in Spain we eat admirably and people always spoke of food poisoning), a heat that presages something incredible at Andalucia. The bullfight, for which we are preparing, will not take place until 4:30. They themselves expect that the sun will not wither them. Nothing, no nothing, can give the right idea of Velásquez. We shall speak of it all the same on my return, with the other things.

I beg you once again, my dear friend, try and join us at Madrid. You could economise more than we do, you are tougher and less exacting than we are. Reckon it out with the timetable, and I bet that with 300 francs you could get a return, travelling second class. We should imitate you. Boldini keeps the accounts and you can form some idea of the need he feels to spend. I shall send you a wire from Seville, so that you can mark us on the map.

It seems possible to set foot in Morocco, but only for a few hours.

I am going to sleep a little, which I did too little last night (18 hours from Irun to Madrid). Met Bonnat on the outside of the omnibus at Biarritz.

Sincerely yours with all my heart,
Degas



To Bartholomé

Continental Hotel, Tangiers, Morocco
Wednesday, 18 Sept. 1889

One can do nothing less than write to you, my dear Bartholomé, from such a spot. Can you imagine me on a mule, taking part in a cavalcade that was led by a guide in a violet silk robe on the sand of the sea, in the dust and along the paths of the surrounding countryside, and then across Tangiers?

Another year will we be able to do the same journey that you gave me the sorrow of doing alone, or very nearly? The guide in the silk robe knows French, but it is not yours.

One loves in nature those people who have not been unworthy to appreciate it. I tell you this because Delacroix passed here.

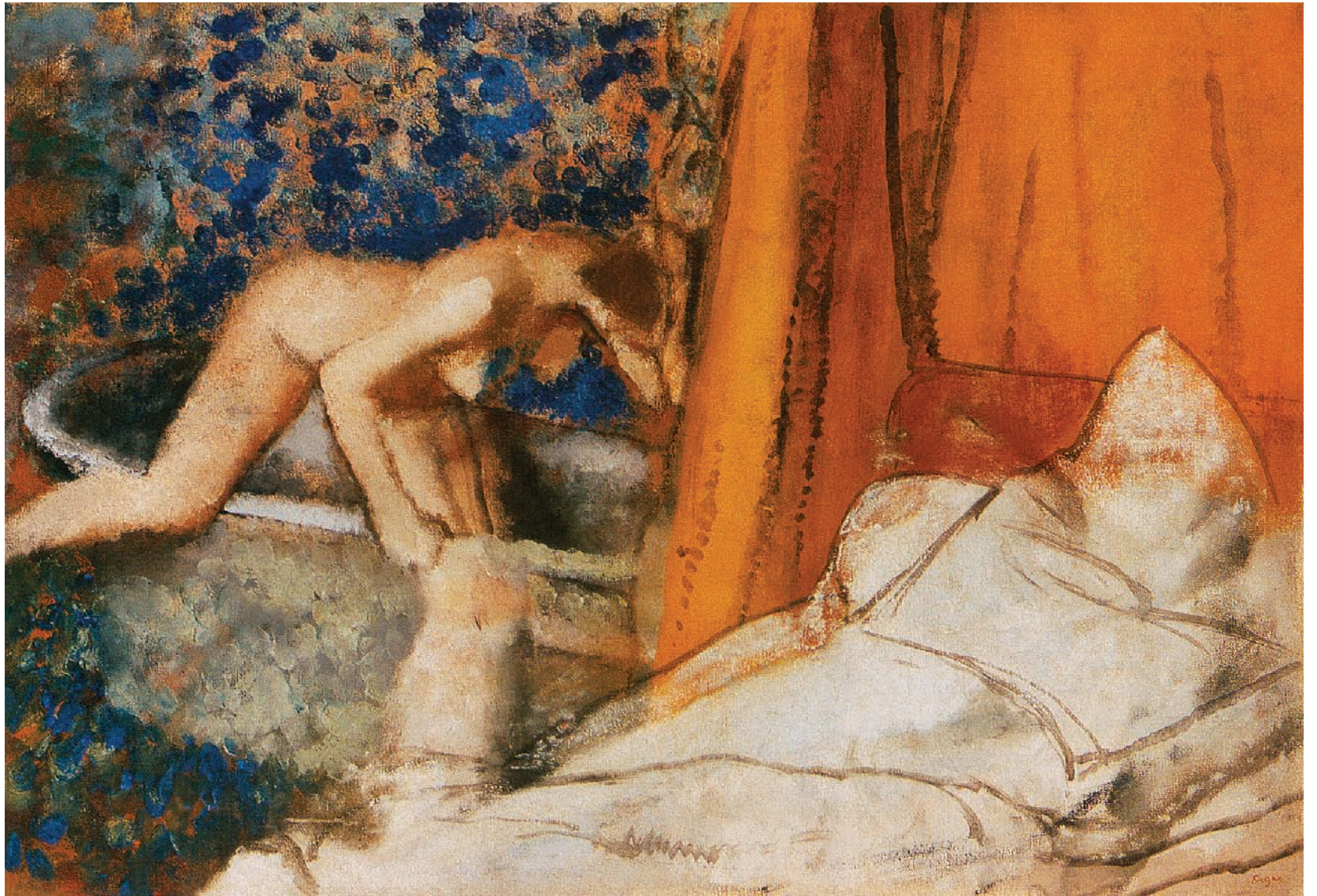
The boat brought us here under a grey sky, but there were all the same in this grey more pearls than slate.

I have nothing to tell you, I am writing to you to date my friendship from Tangiers. In a week at the most I shall be at rue de Chaillot. Tomorrow, return to Cadiz, from whence we leave Friday at 5 o'clock for Granada. After this last effort one can re-read *Thousand and One Nights*. I read in a book that here the families still preserve their landowners' titles in Spain and the keys of their houses through the centuries through which I am passing in such bad company.

Kind regards on rue de la Pompe and very sincerely yours with all my heart.

Degas







To Monsieur Brebion

13 Apr. 1890

Here are the few alterations which, at the advice of my friend and counsellor Bartholomé, I should be obliged if you would make in your lease.

Have the goodness to add apropos the payment in money in gold and silver and not otherwise or in *notes of the Bank of France*. I should like to remain free, as regards the insurance, from opportunism and from the company. It would be equally distasteful to me to be submitted to your inspection of the receipts and to have to bear this double *policing*.

I am content with a simple lease, drawn up between us. If for your special business you need a legalised lease it will be up to you to pay for it. That is perfectly straightforward.

You must make a brief survey of the state of the premises which is not adequate. The moment the repairs are finished, that is to say in two or three days, I hope, we shall make a little inspection together and see on the spot exactly, or approximately what there is. Entirely renovated is a little exaggerated. I did not ask for anything more and I have made concessions to you. I should not like to give anything more.

Finally, in case of a break, that is to say the non-renewal of the lease, three months must suffice. Why six months?

Ah, you really have helped me to earn a little peace in your charming apartment. Do not let us quarrel any more, I beg of you. I am a quiet and solvent tenant, do not ask more from me.

Hoping to see you soon. Let us finish in a day or two, and please accept my compliments.

Degas



To Bartholomé

Received at Angoulême
Monday evening, 29 Apr. 1890

I have a vague idea, my dear friend, that Thursday morning, about 10 o'clock, as your message says, you will find me out, at least in my Studio. In the first place, since yesterday I am sleeping at the house, and then, the papers announcing that there will be no further performances of *Salammbo* after Sunday of this month, I can see myself leaving Wednesday morning at 8:15 for my destination. The danger of Thursday might be found again at Brussels, a strike. Moreover, the whole question does not lie there. There are also the arms of Mme Caron which might be long enough to cover me.

The calicoes from Angoulême impressed you, I see. But the society of Angoulême? Mme de Bargeton? The lady, who in a château in the surroundings has the sole score of *Salammbo*, has she also a dress? This dress is perhaps of the same material as the pattern?

Furnishing continues to preoccupy me. Portier has seen the carpet remnant and above all the famous one, the carpet of the virtuoso, the expensive one.

In spite of a feeling of extravagance which is a mixture of taste and of senile grotesquerie, it is still in the shop where I shall not set foot without your eyes. A new purchase by the Louvre under the eye of Portier, but of no consequence.

You can feel it, the carpet holds me. I am drawn to the carpet like the cat. During the time of the crusades what might one not have found as booty or by chance!

Dinner at the Fleury's on Saturday with Mlle Cassatt. Japanese exhibition at the Beaux Arts. A fireman's helmet on a frog. Alas! Alas! Taste everywhere.

Thank your sister and the colonel for their wishes. See you soon. Manzi whom I have just left has a frock coat with silk lapels. Everything, everything in this world has a sacred meaning.

Kind regards,
Degas







To Bartholomé

Hotel d'Angleterre, Cauterets
24 Aug.

I have just written to Rouart, I am a little tired, I shall write you a long letter another time, my dear friend. Well, Lafond was waiting for me at Pau, having come from Oloron, and the next morning, Wednesday, we both set off for Cauterets. Waited at Lourdes, until 2 o'clock. There was a pilgrimage. All kinds of moving things made for you. You would never have forgotten, as I shall also know how to, a sick woman, dying, on a mattress laid across a sand bench; beside her, her family returning from the cave. Miracles of the body or of the soul, or physical or mystic reactions, what things were painted on their faces. The pilgrims, much better, for the most part than the administration of pilgrimages, a little more simple. Zouaves of the pope doing duty as litter bearers; with my bad eyes, I missed everything you would have seen.

Here I have begun to drink.

It is very fine and very hot. I had promised you some drawings of mountains, and I was a bit too hasty. There are no very attractive forms here. We are closed in and nothing attracts me so far.

All the same, it will be necessary to find distraction. If I can judge by these two days this treatment will be long-drawn-out. They say that Marguerite de Navarres wrote her tales here, to distract herself. I shall not be able to do as much, moreover I have never read them. Met no one to talk to a little freely. Why did you choose this moment to do sculpture? We possess Sarah Bernhardt, she has only Damala with her, her repatriated husband. We had Carolus Duran, in a costume worthy of himself and made for Chili, or for glory.

Write to me. Regards to the Venetian.

Sincerely yours,
Degas

Well, I saw Evariste Michel yesterday, to whom the Autruchien (sic) Clermont had not written.



To Bartholomé

Cauterets
Thursday, 28 Aug. 1890

I had much difficulty in reading the few pencilled thoughts that came from Diénay with the portrait of Carnot. And I saw you at Bourgogne as a friend carried away by the need to move, for yourself, but not for the dog. To take a dog to the country, for him to have a holiday instead of his master, that is true merit. Here, near la Raillère, ground has been hired for a pack of dogs who were hot at Pau, by an Englishman who has not, I believe, left Pau. So you are two. Tillot is, at the moment, Tillot for the ladies. How often does one not see him at the side of Mme Alice Kerr, artist of the theatre, having played second soubrettes at Montpellier, and supposed to play them soon at Lyon! He has suffered for good and all. Glasses conceal the ardours, with glasses one devours with the eyes. He has ceased to bore us, it is we who bore him. We pity him and it is the height of pleasure; but he has not had the lady, I guarantee; he is miserly, he wishes to offer something other than money. Everything is written on his exasperated person.

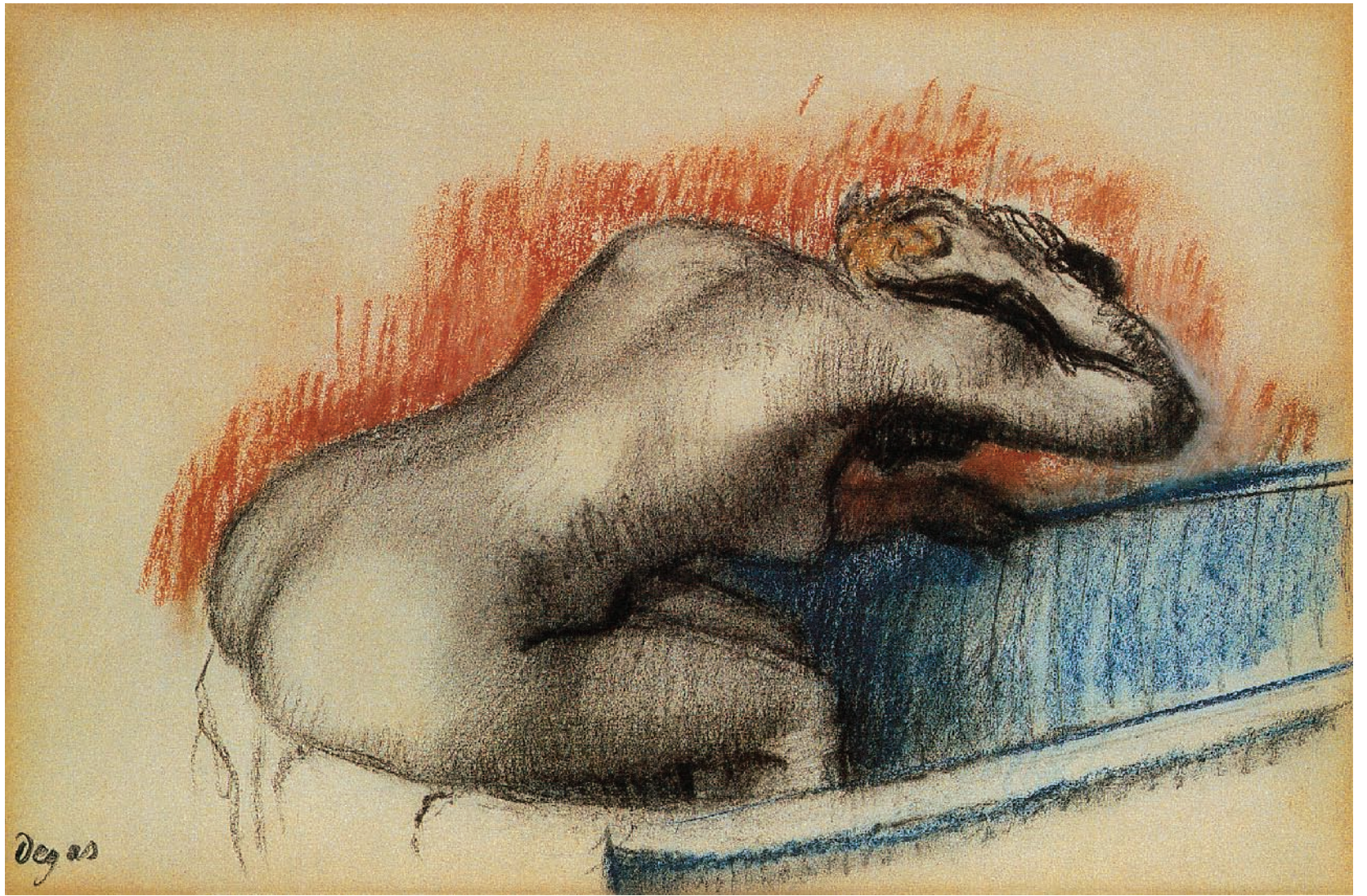
I shall leave here for Pau Sunday or Monday evening to shut myself up with Cherfils for two or three days. From there it is a question of going to Geneva where my brother Achille, who is no better, is waiting for me. From Geneva you have guessed without showing it too much that we could meet at Dijon to go and spend a day at Diénay by Is-sur-Tille. We can bring back the dog and God's will would be done.

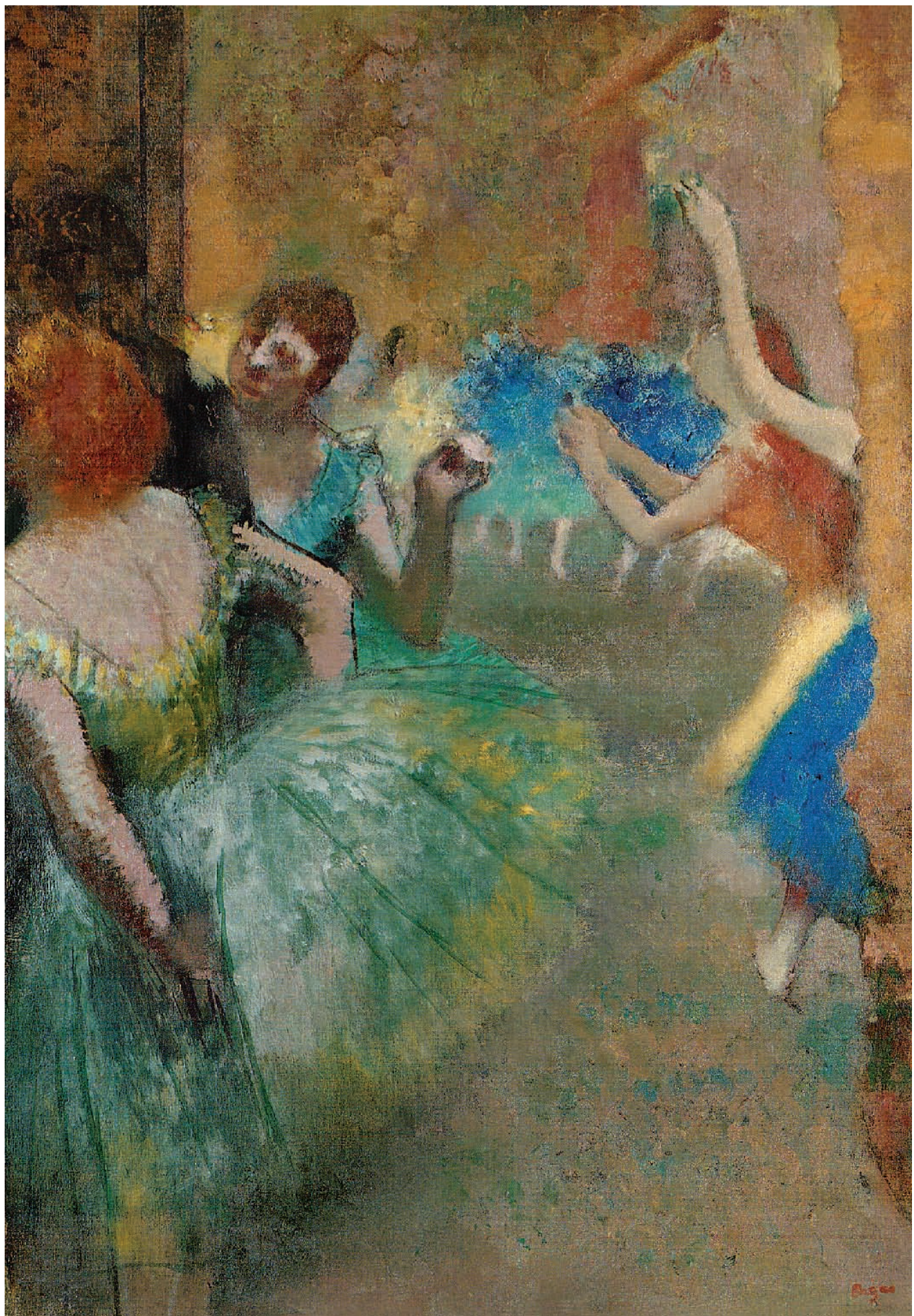
I was afraid of bronchitis, everything was shaping for it, it was avoided. What a terrible climate. It is raining at the moment. The mountain festival, postponed from Sunday to today, has been postponed to the first fine day, so says the crier on his drum ...

... Did I tell you that I have a neighbour at table, a friend of Lenhart (sic), who posed in the picture *le Bonheur et le Dessin*? He reproaches Lenhart, not without a certain wisdom, with always having an idea when he does a picture. Delauny is here, I met him this morning and he told me that Mme Straus had just deposited Meilhac at Louchon, she was driving herself and injured her face. Meilhac has an attack of gout...

... Yesterday, the audition in the happy place of my choice! Well, I must tell you, this penetrating air, would it have moved me more if the flute had been accompanied? No. It would have moved me, this flute, far from nature, on a painted canvas, because the presence of nature is insipid in a work of such art and also, if the idea of happiness must make me cry, it is when I am unhappy and at the theatre.

Amen,
Degas







To De Valernesviii

Tuesday, 1890

My Dear Friend,

M. de Saint-Paulet came to urge me on your behalf to take the road for Carpentras. I shall go straight there, I shall go on to Geneva afterwards. You know that I have not stirred at all from Paris, glued to pictures that I do not finish.

And now your friend Morel has left and you must miss him quite often. So I shall see the good Salla again and the handsome Liébastres, and smell the scent of caramels.

It will be less cold than here, the cold arrived very bitter all at once.

It is probable that you will see me arriving Sunday or Monday. Moreover, I shall send you one of those telegrams that astonish you so much.

Your old friend,
Degas



To De Valernes

Sunday, 1890

Why no news from you, my old comrade?

The fine weather is coming at last, you will pick up a little; go out on the arm of M. de Saint-Paulet, leave your grotto for a while.

I was still waiting for a letter from M. Milon about the du Laurent family. I am afraid that his silence hides a little irritation.

On leaving you, I went to spend the night at Lyon and early in the morning I left again for Geneva.

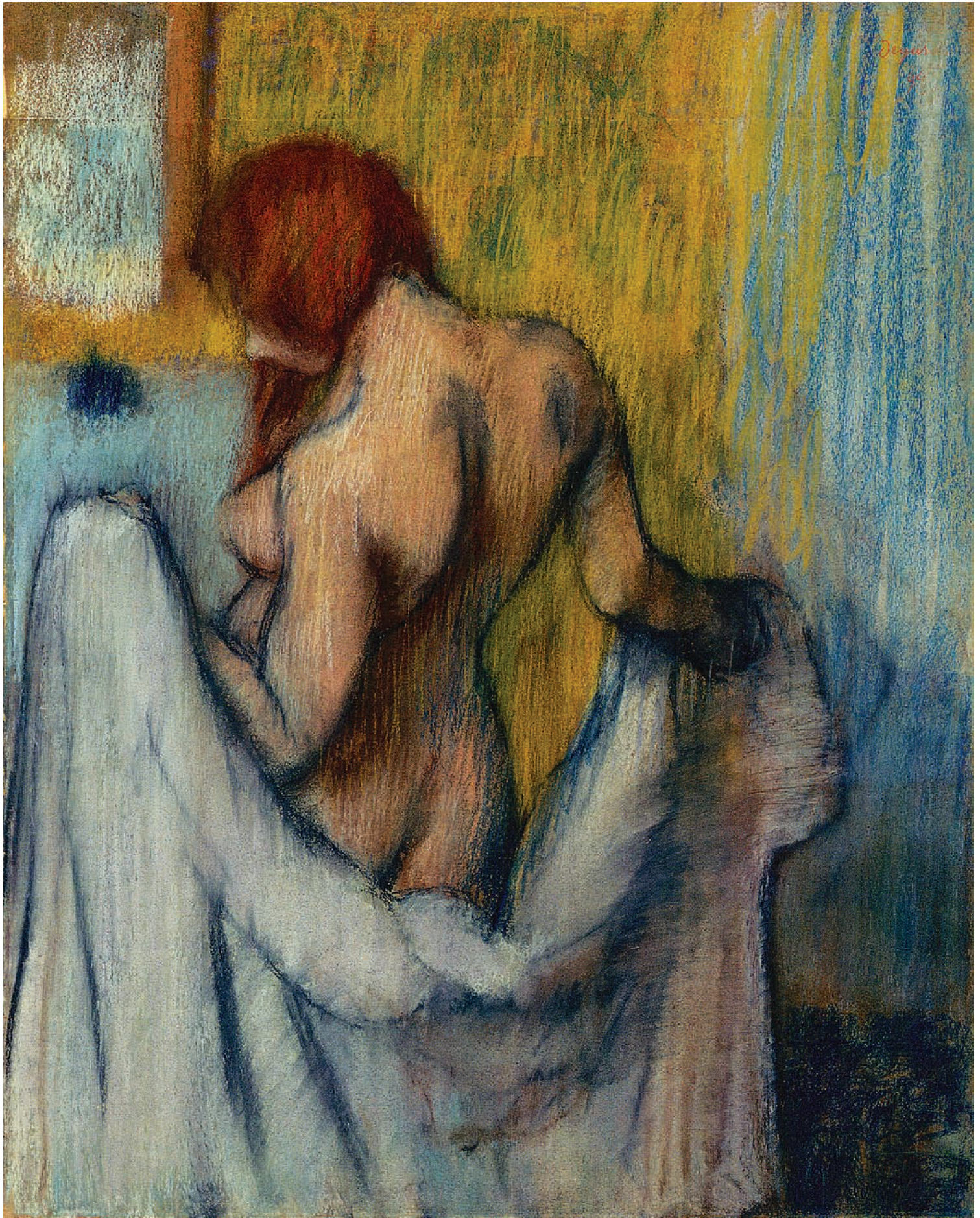
I saw the sculptor Lenoir twice in the matter of your young marble cutter, and I have nothing to add to what I told you at your house. It is impossible to promise anything to a man of whose work one has seen nothing and of whom one knows only of one quality, that of being accustomed to the unique texture of the material, without any knowledge of the execution, with scarcely any studies of the nude. It is essential for this boy to get accustomed to the idea of risking all by going to Paris.

You will have received or you will receive the photographs of Bartholomé, who has retained a real impression of you. My regards to Madame Henriette and a handclasp for her.

I embrace you, my old friend; towards September you will see me at Carpentras, back from Cauterets.

Ask young de Saint-Paulet to present my respects to his mother, whom I must have offended. My regards to Mrs Milon, Salla.

Degas







To De Valernes

Paris
26 Oct. 1890

I have been thinking constantly of you with the most affectionate feeling and I did not write to you, my dear de Valernes.

Your beautiful letter came to me in a little village, called Diénay in the Côte-d'Or, where we were, Bartholomé and I, led by the following adventure:

After Geneva, on leaving you, I met the said faithful friend at Dijon, from where we went to the said Diénay to see the Jeanniots, who live there for a third of the year, and after having left them and once back again in Paris, the memory of the pleasure of this spot and the desire to get to know a little better the admirable burgundy, brought me to such a pitch of travelling excitement that I persuaded my good comrade to share my folly.

And this folly, now classified by us and by the others as an act of particular wisdom, could only be appeased by the hiring of a tilbury and a white horse, and by traversing in 20 days, 5 of which were days of rest at Diénay, more than 600 kilometres, that is 150 leagues.

When the fine season returns, we will start again with another horse (he is too weak in the forelegs), with the same type of carriage we will perhaps go as far as the rue Sadolet to stir your old heart again, see your philosopher's house again, your museum, your room for drawing, allow you to get to know Bartholomé to whom I so often speak of you, of your energetic and tender life. All this will alarm you. But you will not have the courage to tell me that you are afraid. We shall leave or we shall not leave the animal at the Hotel de l'Univers and we shall drag you with us to Avignon, to see your Sainte Thérèse (she is in the museum, is she not?) to talk of Delacroix and of everything that can (it is art that we have the duty to practise) bewitch truth, give her the appearance of madness.

I can see you and your little studio, where I gave the impression of looking too quickly. I see it again, as if it were in front of me.

I can even tell you, that this survey has added almost nothing more distinct, for I had forgotten nothing and I found again your two phases of living (less divided than you think and than I, too, used to think). You have always been the same man, my old friend. Always there has persisted in you that streak of delightful romanticism, which adorns and colours truth, gives her that air of madness, as I have just told you, which does good.



Here I must ask your pardon for a thing which often comes up in your conversation and more often still in your thoughts: it is to have been during our long relationship to art, or to have seemed to be hard with you.

I have been unusually so with myself, you must be fully aware of this seeing that you were constrained to reproach me with it and to be surprised that I had so little confidence in myself.

I was, or I seemed to be, hard with everyone through a sort of passion for brutality, which came from my uncertainty and my bad humour. I felt myself so badly made, so badly equipped, so weak, whereas it seemed to me, that my calculations on art were so right. I brooded against the whole world and against myself. I ask your pardon sincerely if, beneath the pretext of this damned art, I have wounded your very intelligent and fine mind, perhaps even your heart.

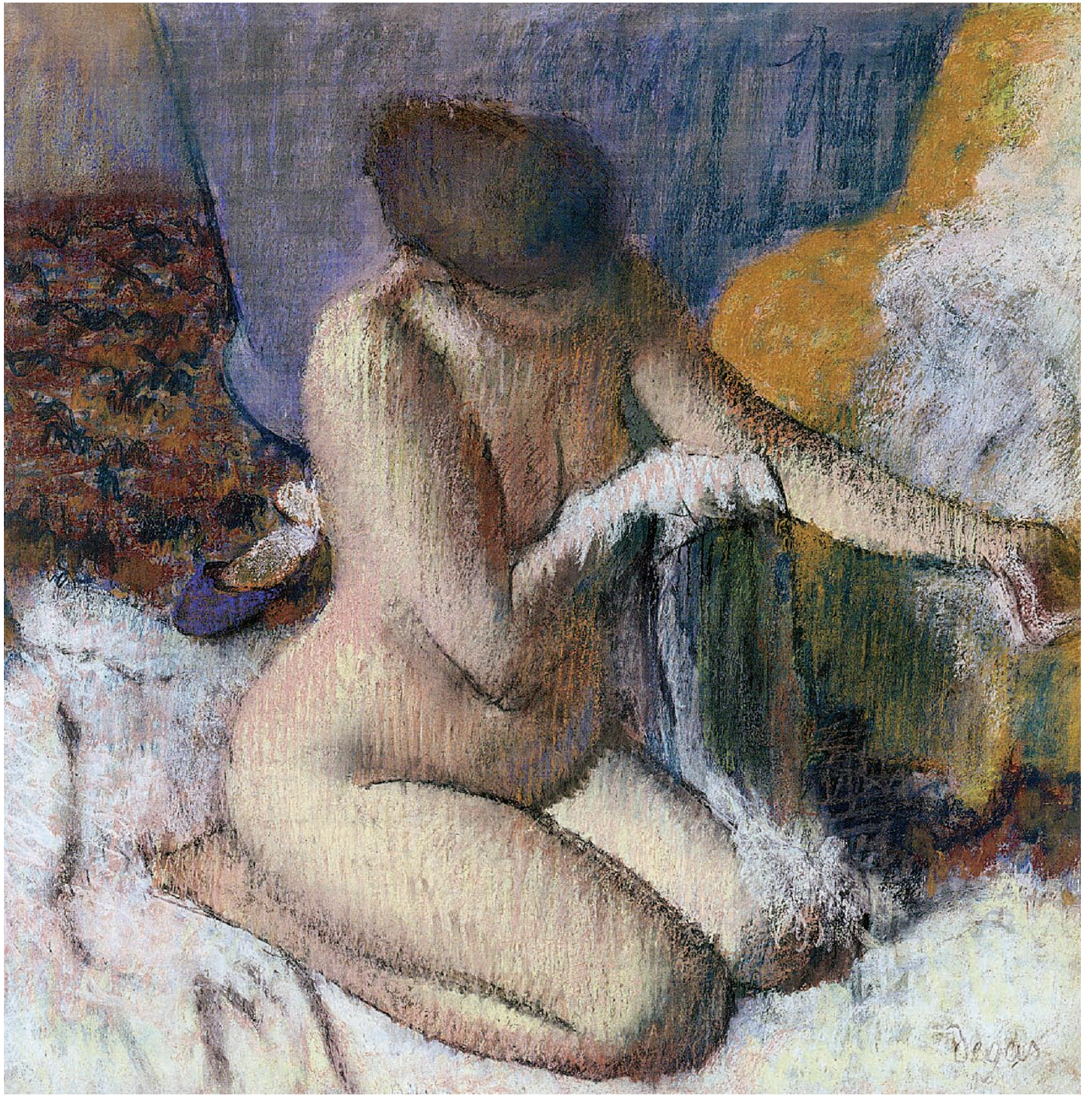
That picture of the Malade of which I can visualise not only the effect and the ensemble and the general air of simple unhappiness, but each stroke of the brush and the execution (as it were a la Duranty), is a beautiful picture. The composition of the two Arlesian women, the way they are grouped, is delightful.

I found in you again the same vigorous mind, the same vigorous and steady hand, and I envy you your eyes which will enable you to see everything until the last day. Mine will not give me this joy; I can scarcely read the papers a little and in the morning, when I reach my studio, if I have been stupid enough to linger somewhat over the deciphering, I can no longer get down to work.

Remember that you must count on me when the moment comes. Write to me.

I embrace you,
Degas

My regards to Monsieur Liébrastes and also to the charming Salla.







To De Valernes

6 Dec. 1891

You have guessed right, my old friend, I do not write on account of the fatigue of writing, and except for a few laconic words, my sister Marguerite is the only one to receive letters from me from time to time.

I see worse than ever this winter, I do not even read the newspapers a little, it is Zoé, my maid, who reads to me during lunch. Whereas you, in your rue Sadolet in your solitude, have the joy of having your eyes.

Your friend M. le Marquis de Saint-Paulet came, nearly a month ago, to see me and speak at great length about you! I shall go on Wednesday (his at-home day) to return his visit. He must have there the portrait you did of him and with which he is very pleased.

I have allowed time to slip by without thanking you for your present of the picture of the milliners, or rather the florists, which I remember perfectly, with a supple woman's hand and a romantic style that I can see from here. It is I who am at the moment doubly your debtor, first of all because of my promise, and secondly because of this nice present. This summer for certain I shall go and see you and you may count on my not arriving with empty hands.

Ah! Sigh! Sigh! Sigh!

My mind feels heavier than before in the studio and the difficulty of seeing makes me feel numb. And since man, happily, does not measure his strength, I dream nevertheless of enterprises; I am hoping to do a suite of lithographs, a first series on nude women at their *toilette* and a second one on nude dancers. In this way, one continues to the last day figuring things out. It is very fortunate that it should be so.

Will you have the courage to come to Paris one day? There will always be a *pied à terre* for you with your old friend. Desboutin, still young at 70 years, thrones with his pipes at the entrance of a café, you will see him again with pleasure. And others too! Permit yourself this indiscretion and when I am at Carpentras during the holidays I shall make a more serious attempt to carry you off.

Goodbye, my dear old comrade, your letters give me great pleasure, write to me seeing that you have the good fortune to be able to do so better than I.

Regards to M. Liébrastes and to that Vallot. I spoke of him to M. de Saint-Paulet, who told me about his adventure in the drawing of lots for money and his well-being. What would you like in the way of books or anything else? I am at your disposal.



To Daniel Halévy

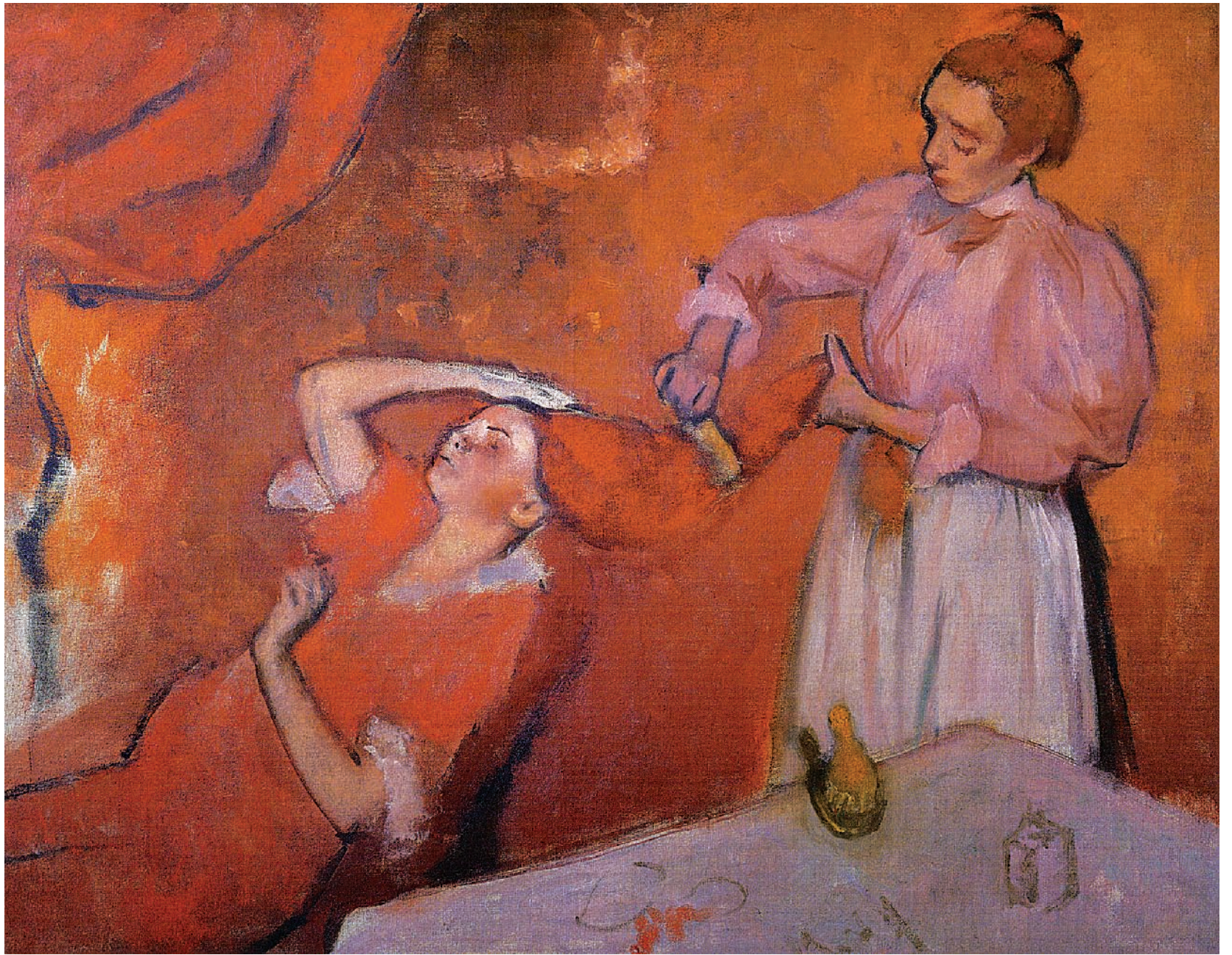
Ménil-Hubert, Gacé
Aug. 1892

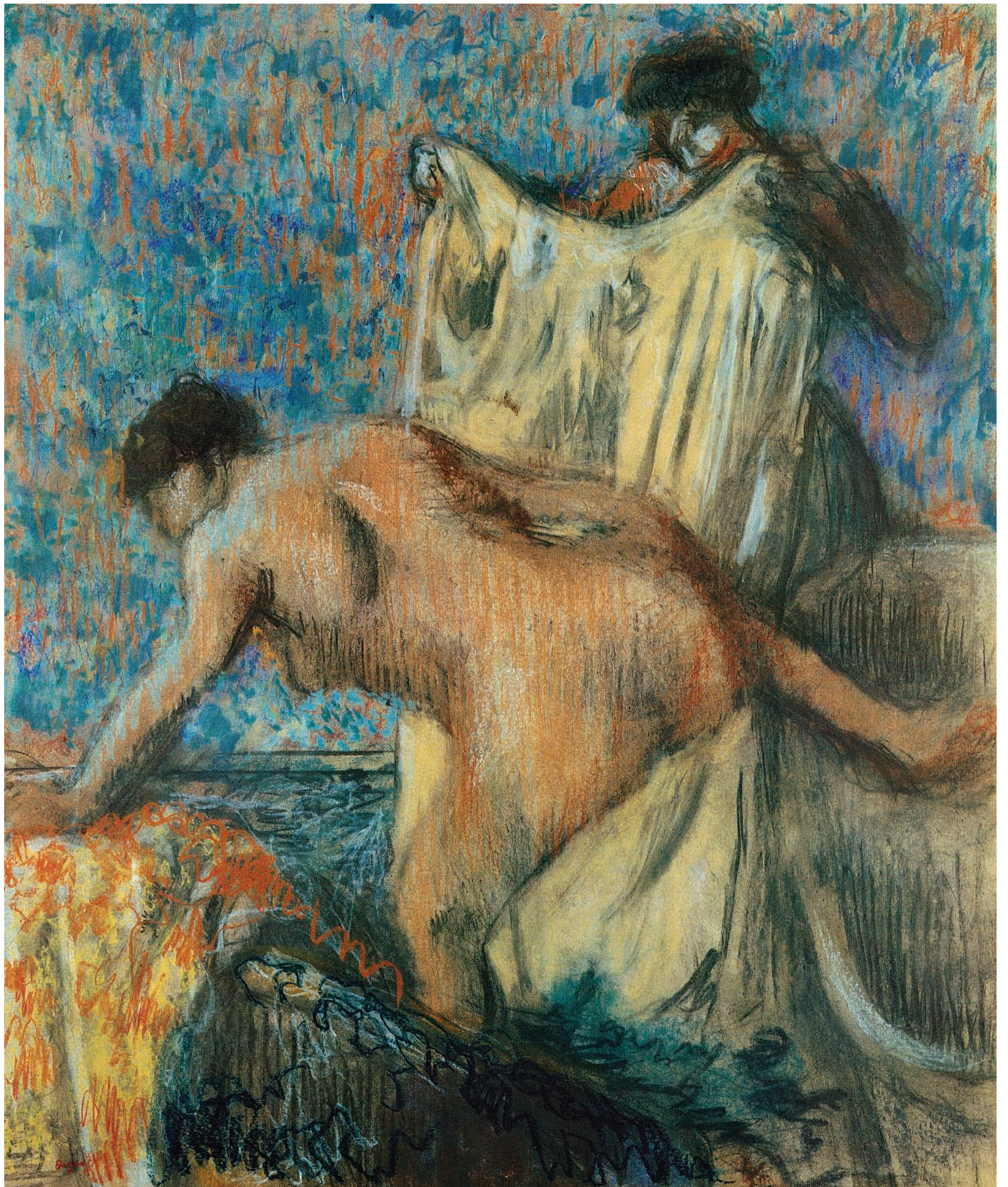
But, Daniel, I left on the 8th. Your letter, brought by your comrade, reached me here, follow me if you like maps, arriving at Carpentras to go via Grenoble, Chambéry to Geneva and finally to Saint-James. All that will take me a good 10 days at least. So little chance of contemplating one another before 1 September. Greetings to your family whose pen you are rapidly becoming, legible enough to give me pleasure.

Yours affectionately,
Degas

Regarding the letter I am unable to tell you if Mlle Yoyo brought it up or not, if she dared to speak to Zoé. We shall find out. So when shall we drape her as Iphigenia? Have you a Thoas ready?

If you want to have an idea of the nature of my thoughts take the chorus of Euryanthe and listen to me singing all day long, in falsetto: When we seek the king himself ... Hunter lost in the woods, with the interrupted cadence ... in the woods. It is beautiful, disquieting, airy, firm.







To De Valernes

Wednesday evening, 1893

My old comrade, my kidneys make me grumble a lot, except at you, who have the goodness to think more of me than I do of you. Otherwise I am well and I am dreading a stay in my room, without work, without being able to read, staring into space. My sight too is changing for the worse. I am pitying myself, so that you may know that you are not the only unhappy person.

With regard to writing, ah! my friends can scarcely count on me. Just imagine that to re-read what I write to you would present such difficulty, even with the magnifying glass, that I should give it up after the first lines. And with it all I am cheerful, as you were able to ascertain yourself.

Towards the end of the year, you will see me arriving, my old friend, to rouse you for a moment.

I embrace you very affectionately,
Degas

Thank M. Milon.



To Ludovic Halévy

Hotel Jungfrau, Interlaken
Monday, 31 Aug. 1893

If I did not stop 3 days at Diénay near Dijon, with the Jeanniots, I should be with you on Wednesday, my dear Halévy, I am leaving here at 4 o'clock to spend the night at Dijon, where Bartholomé himself must finally land.

Your vegetable garden must be burned up. Impossible to take one step without being bathed in perspiration. I have scarcely left the side of the poor invalid and my heroic sister. Women have goodness when we are no longer worth anything.

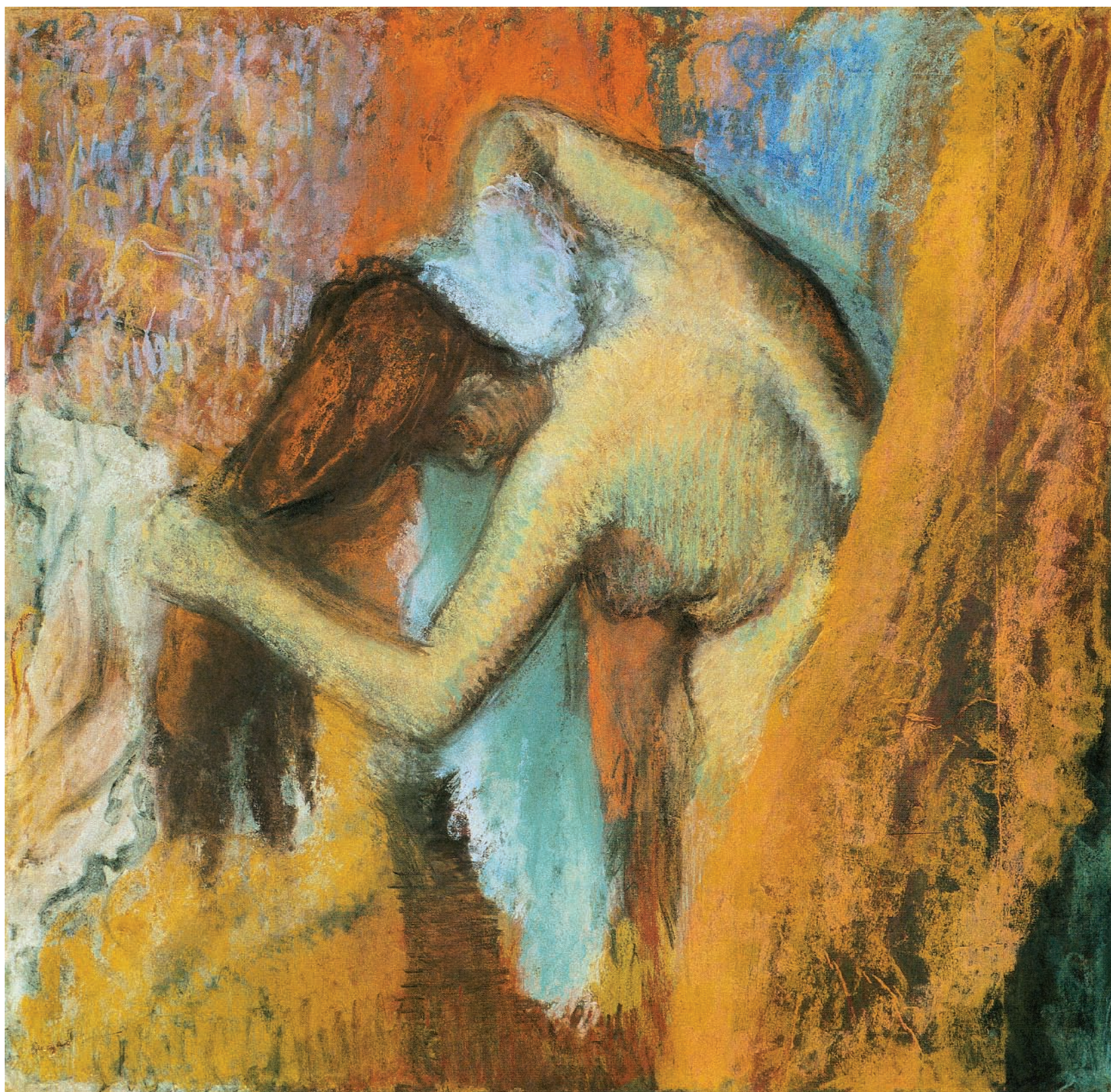
I shall go and see Rouart before the end of his holiday in the Queue.

What a lot of Germans here, and Frenchmen, ridiculous too. If I did not feel myself to be simple enough as the inn keeper at Cauterets told me, I should be worried about the impression I make.

It is impossible for me to live far away from my studio and not to work. In a few days I shall be content.

Greetings to Louise and her sons.

Affectionately,
Degas







To Alexis Rouart

Paris
28 July 1896

I do not understand, and your cook must have told you so from me, my dear friend, Sunday when you managed to ring on three floors without being let in by people who were expecting you. We were expecting you, Zoé and I, and we should certainly have heard you if you had made a noise, either rung or knocked. However! Should I thank you for your affectionate letter? Why do you stroke a tiger?

Moreover, for lack of Bengal he is going to ravage the Mont-Dore.

From there, in 25 days time, I shall put forwards a little scheme to you. I should like, once the treatment is finished, to go down to Montauban, by dint of pulling strings, get the keeper of the museum to show me the whole lot of Ingres' drawings. It will be a matter of several days, listing, classifying, etc. Do you feel like joining in this sport?

I shall give you my address once I am housed at Mont-Dore and you can reply to me there.

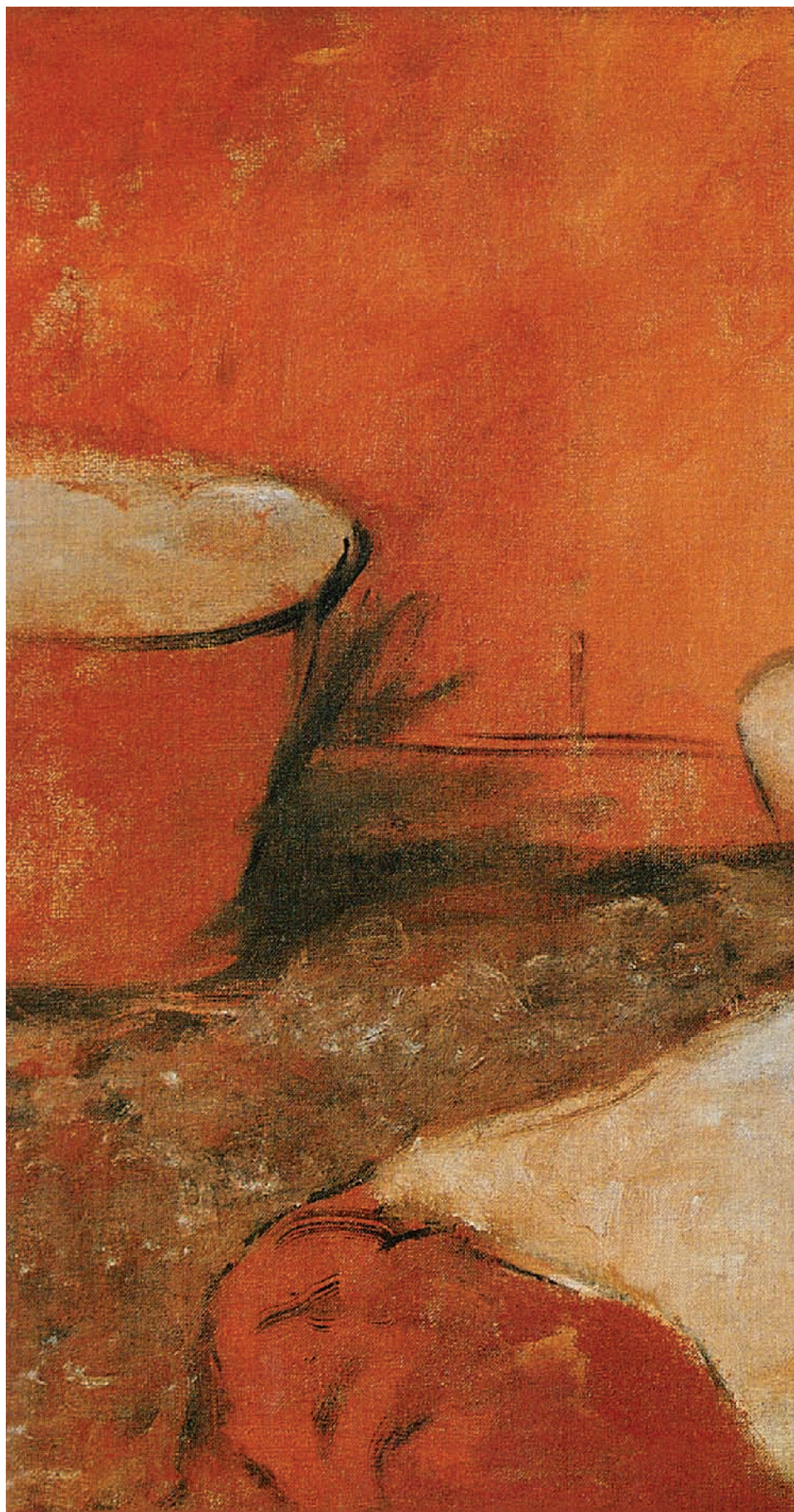
Your brother writes from Touraine that he will be in Paris on Friday and that he is expecting me to dinner.

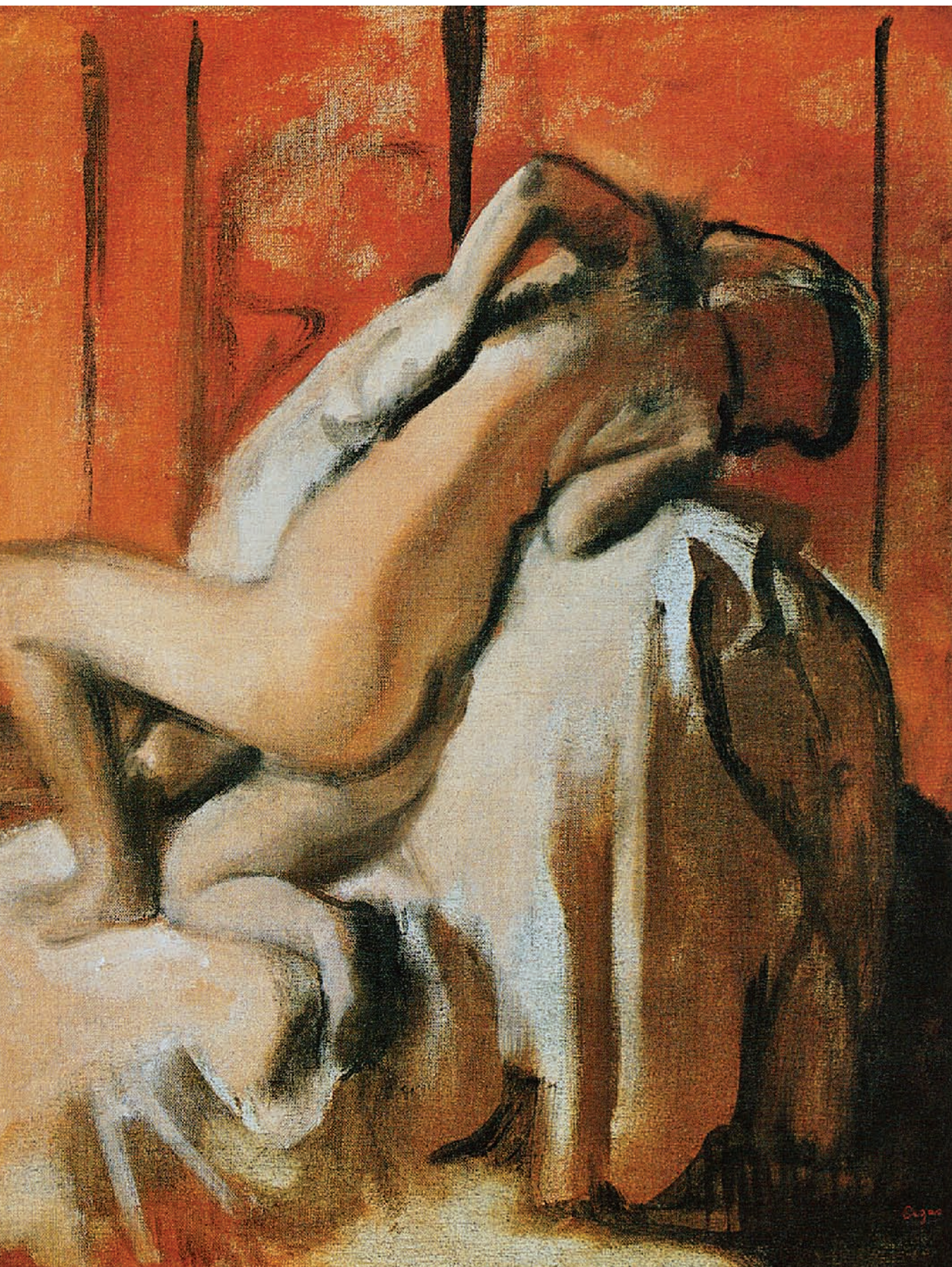
I have not done badly as regards work, without much progress.

Everything is long for a blind man who wants to pretend that he can see.

My regards to Mme Rouart and ever your,
Degas

After the Bath, c. 1896.
Pastel, 89.5 x 116.8 cm.
The Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts,
Philadelphia.







To Alexis Rouart

Saint-Valery-sur-Somme

Postmark: September 1898

Here your letter found me, my dear friend. Were it not for landscapes that I am determined to try, I should have left. My brother had to go back to his paper on the 1st, and the landscape(!) kept me here a few days longer.

Your brother, will he believe this?

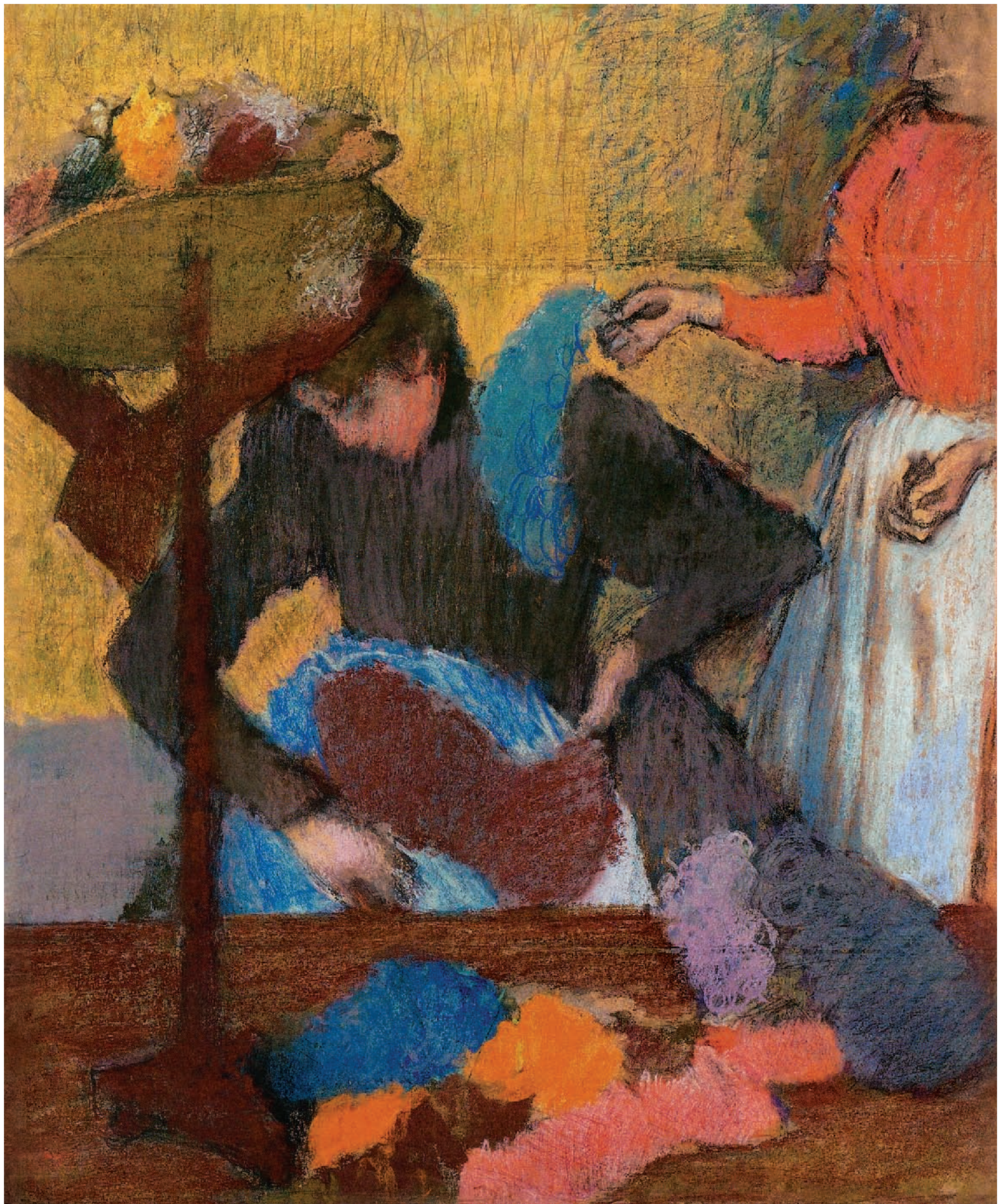
Have you tried flowers with ordinary plates or extra steel faced?

Difficulty, there is nothing but that. I do not speak of business so as not to cry with rage.

Greetings to Mme Rouart and to yourself,

Degas







To Alexis Rouart

Pontarlier
7 Sept. 1904

It is raining, I am in a café. I think of my friends when I am bored, I have no pleasure in myself. I was waiting to reply to your good and long letter, my dear friend, until I was a little forced to do so by a damnable day. That is how one is, no worse than any other.

And so one left Paris at last, on the doctors orders, to sample the altitude. From Paris to Epinal, Gerardmer, La Schluchte (sic) passed to Alsace, Munster Turkeim (sic), Colmar, returned to France, Belfort, Besancon, Ornans, and finally stayed 15 days at Pontarlier from where I radiate a little. I shall return via Nancy, I shall have done more than the three weeks recommended. Without Grosjean the deputy, who kept me company a little, I should not have chosen this absinthe factory.

See you soon maybe – I really need to see you again all of you, all of you Rouarts.

Greetings to your wife.

Your old friend,
Degas



To Alexis Rouart

6 Aug. 1907

I am not worth very much as regards correspondence, my good friend. My excuse might be that you were expecting it.

I am still here working. Here I am back again at drawing and pastel. I should like to succeed in finishing my articles. At all costs it must be done. Journeys do not tempt me anymore. At about 5 o'clock I dash out into the surroundings. There is no lack of trams that take you to Charenton or elsewhere.

Sunday I am going with Saint-Maurice to see your brother who is gradually recovering. In the evening one returns to the great city.

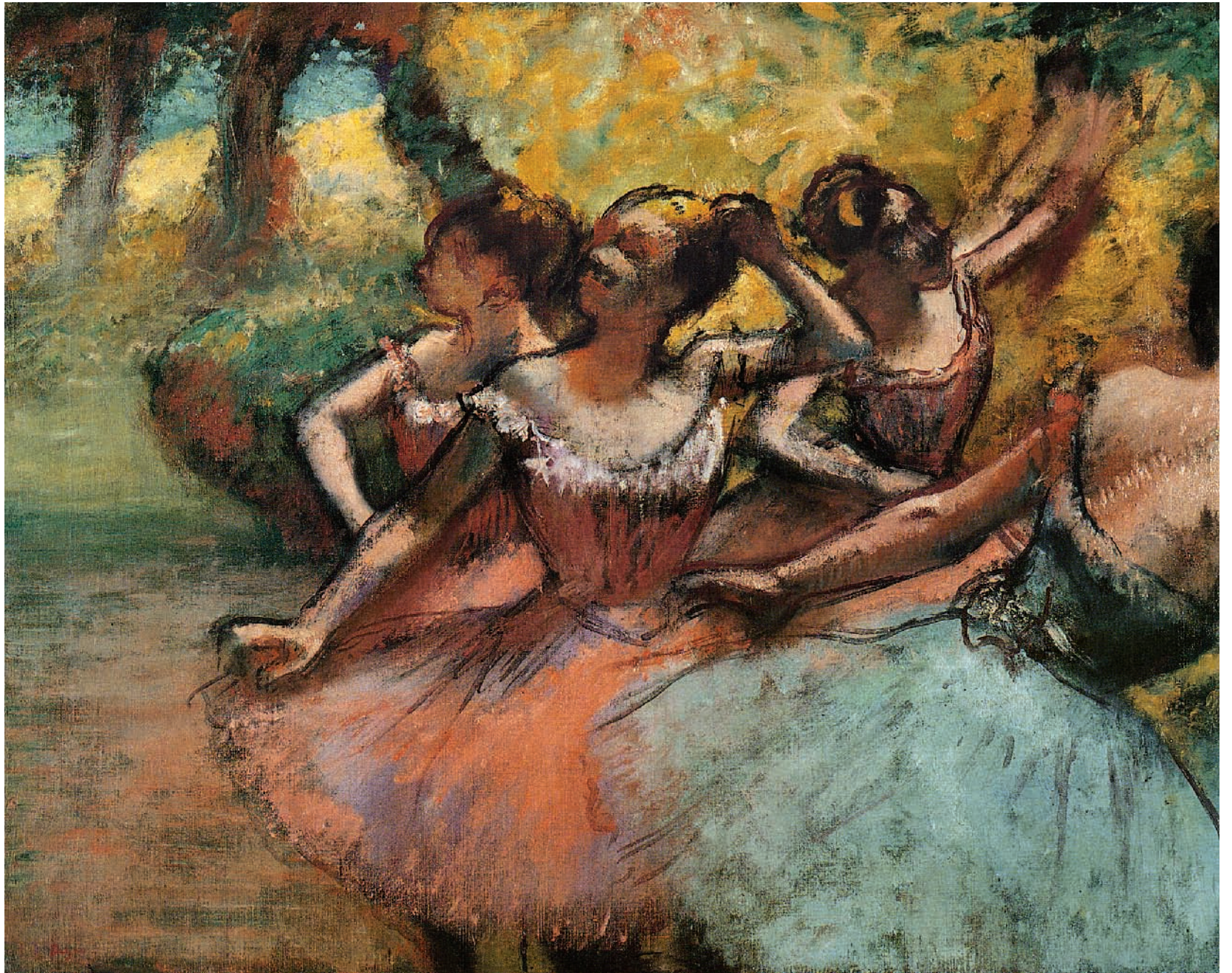
I have pains in my kidney which will not stop. And you, where are you with your pains? Write to me. You have a fine handwriting.

My good wishes to Mme Rouart.

Your old friend,
Degas

Chialiva's son came to carry me off on behalf of his father in the Puys-de-Dôme.







To Alexis Rouart

21 Aug. 1908

Do not be angry with me, my dear friend, for replying so late to your good (sic). Soon I will be a blind man. Where there are no fish one should not try to fish. And I wish to sculpt.

Good health to both of you,
Degas

To Alexis Rouart

Monsieur A. Rouart
Grand Hotel Bellevue, San Remo
Postmark: Paris, rue Fontaine, 11. 3. 10.
Friday

No, my dear friend, I am no longer of these artists who race to the Italian frontier. I remain in the damp, facing the Bal Tabarin. You will soon return to our waters.

I do not finish with my damned sculpture.

Greetings,
Degas



To Alexis Rouart

Monday

My Dear Rouart,

You did well to write to me, I was going to go and dine with you tomorrow. A thousand good wishes for the travellers to Allévard. I would much like to see you about a matter of lithographs, which preoccupies me very much. Gosselin sent his son to tell me that he had 93 Gavarni proofs before letters (those of Lessore). I have seen them, the majority are very fine, and I told Gosselin that I could not make up my mind before you had seen them. And then I only want to take them gradually. He asks 550 francs for the lot, and I cannot spend such a sum all in one. Try and look at them. Examine them well, to see if they really are all proofs before letters, if there are not any with concealed letters, etc.

It is an excellent bargain, which will send my collection soaring up. You, for your part, have you found anything?
Terrible, terrible.

Regards,
Degas

To Alexis Rouart

Undated

My Dear Friend,

I am not coming to dinner tomorrow. Halévy is starting his Tuesdays again and he made the whole band promise to be there for the re-opening.

I am classifying my stock at Delorière. Sunday next, could you come to luncheon with me and lead me afterwards to the Danvin?

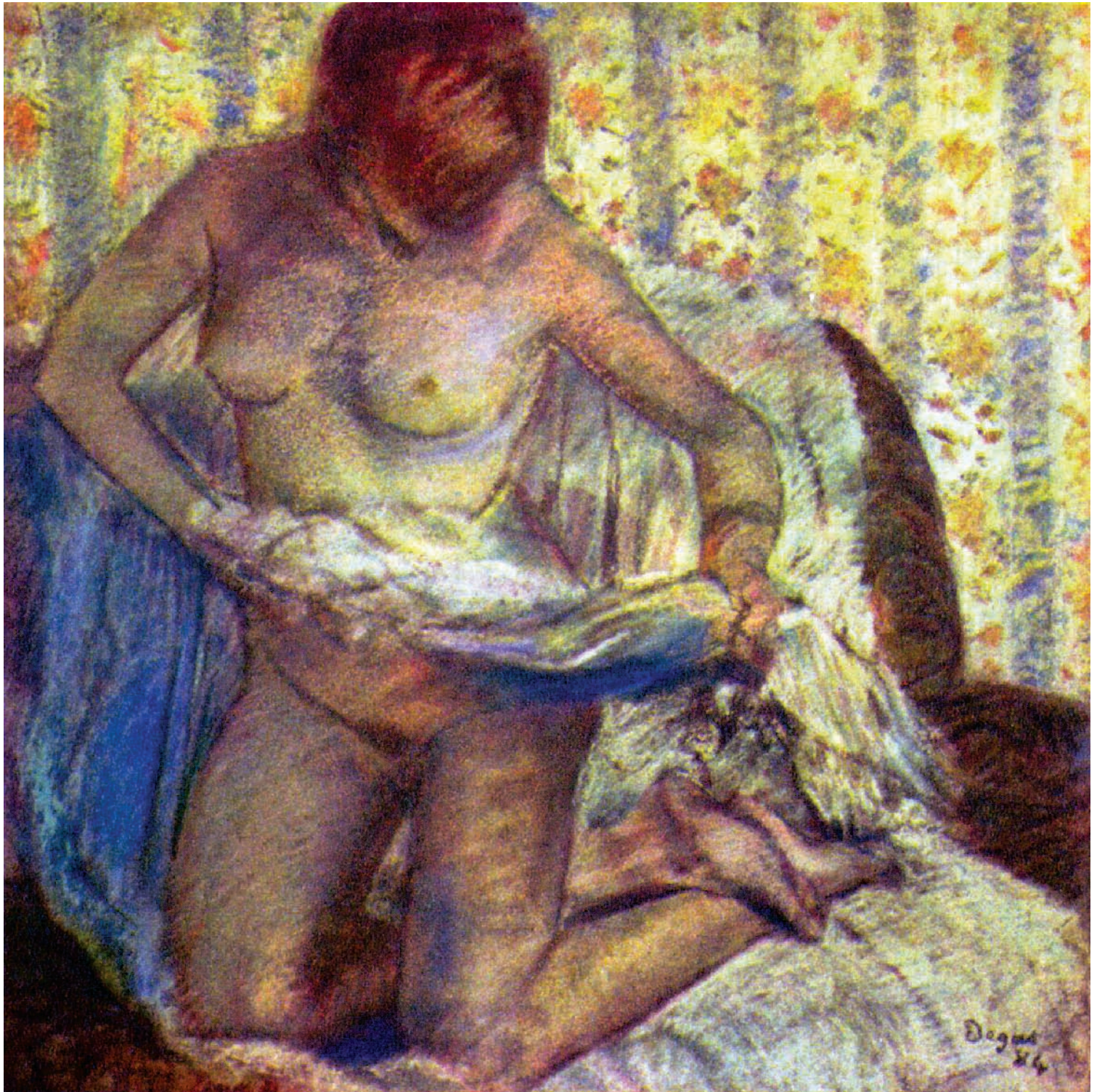
I see from the calendar that your next Tuesday will be 8 March, which is rather far off.

Wednesday morning I left everything to look by daylight, with a magnifying glass, and for a long time at the magnificent Gavarnis that you gave me.

I am keeping a special box for pieces of this class and I put beside each one an ordinary print which doubles my delight in the extraordinary one.

Do you understand, eh?

Degas



NOTES

- i. Lorenz Frølich (1820-1908), Danish draughtsman and painter born in Copenhagen, studied in Paris where he met Manet in Couture and Degas' workshop. He stayed in Paris until 1872, when he returned to Denmark for the rest of his years.
- ii. The famous singer Jean-Baptiste Faure met Degas through Manet around 1871. He commissioned a painting from Degas representing a dance class or exam at the Opera. Degas went about painting for him four large canvases which must have been: *Dancers in Pink*, *Ballet Scene From Meyerbeer's Opera 'Robert le Diable'*, *On the Racing Field*, and *A Woman Ironing*.
- iii. Auguste Joseph Bracquemond, known as Félix Bracquemond (1833-1914), was a painter, engraver, and decorative artist. He played an essential role in the revival of engraving, and persuaded Monet and Degas to use this technique.
- iv. Philippe Burty (1830-1890) was an art critic for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, then for Léon Gambetta's *République Française*, and published a range of pieces on the Fine Arts. He was one of the first to appreciate and collect original engravings by major artists, his contemporaries. Similarly to his close friends, the Goncourt brothers, he collected Japanese stamps and pieces of art.
- v. Alexis Rouart (1839-1911). Born into a family of industrialists, and younger brother of Henri Rouart (1833-1912), who was renowned for his collection of paintings (Delacroix, Millet, Degas, Corot, etc.), Alexis Rouart had also assembled a remarkable collection of drawings and paintings of the great Masters of the 19th century, as well as many important pieces from the Far East and a range of beautiful lithographs.
- vi. Durand-Ruel was a gallery-owner and Degas' personal financier, advancing him money which Degas would reimburse with his paintings.
- vii. Jean Boldini, born in Ferrara, Italy in 1845 and died in Paris in 1931, painted various portraits, the most well-known of which are those of Count Robert de Montesquiou, John Lewis Brown, and Whistler.
- viii. Évariste Bernardi de Valernes, born in 1820, worked in the workshop of Delacroix, making paintings. Although he was 14 years older than Degas, the two of them developed a strong friendship. Degas' realist influence on this old romanticist was profound, as Delacroix abandoned his historical subjects for contemporary scenes.

INDEX

A

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>The Absinthe Drinker or Glass of Absinthe</i> , 1875-1876 | 41 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , 1883 | 123 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , c. 1883 | 62 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , 1890-1893 | 150 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , 1895 | 174 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , c. 1895-1898 | 173 |
| <i>After the Bath</i> , c. 1896 | 184-185 |
| <i>After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself</i> , c. 1890-1895 | 146 |
| <i>At the Milliner's</i> , c. 1882 | 115 |
| <i>At the Milliner's</i> , c. 1898 | 188 |

B

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Ballerina</i> , c. 1878 | 94 |
| <i>The Ballet Dancer</i> , 1891 | 161 |
| <i>Ballet Dancers in the Wings</i> , 1900 | 191 |
| <i>Ballet Dancers in White</i> , c. 1878 | 93 |
| <i>Ballet from an Opera Box</i> , c. 1884 | 133 |
| <i>The Ballet from "Robert le Diable"</i> , 1871 | 20 |
| <i>Ballet Scene</i> , c. 1893 | 166 |
| <i>The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer's Opera "Robert Le Diable"</i> , 1876 | 46 |
| <i>The Bath</i> , c. 1895 | 158 |
| <i>The Bath, Woman Sponging Her Back</i> , c. 1887 | 145 |
| <i>The Bathers</i> , c. 1890-1895 | 154 |
| <i>Before the Curtain Call</i> , 1892 | 162 |
| <i>Blue Dancers</i> , c. 1890 | 170 |
| <i>Breakfast After the Bath</i> , 1883 | 120 |

C

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Café-Concert at Les Ambassadeurs</i> , 1876-1877 | 57 |
| <i>Café Concert at 'The Ambassadors'</i> , 1885 | 128 |
| <i>Combing the Hair</i> , c. 1896 | 177 |

D

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| <i>The Dance Class</i> , c. 1873 | 37, 38 |
| <i>The Dance Class</i> , c. 1873-1876 | 30 |

| | |
|--|-------|
| <i>The Dance Examination</i> , c. 1880 | 108 |
| <i>The Dance Foyer at the Opera on the rue Le Petelcier</i> , 1872 | 23 |
| <i>The Dance Rehearsal</i> , c. 1877 | 70 |
| <i>Dancer (Studio)</i> , c. 1878 | 89 |
| <i>Dancer in her Dressing Room</i> , 1878-1879 | 90 |
| <i>Dancer in her Dressing Room</i> , c. 1879 | 101 |
| <i>Dancer Inspecting the Bottom of her Right Foot</i> , 1880 | 111 |
| <i>Dancer Posing for a Photograph</i> , c. 1877-1878 | 73 |
| <i>Dancer Standing, her Hands Crossed Behind her Back</i> , 1873 | 33 |
| <i>Dancer with a Bouquet, Curtseying</i> , 1878 | 74 |
| <i>Dancers Backstage</i> , 1876/1883 | 45 |
| <i>Dancers in the Wings</i> , 1880 | 82 |
| <i>Dancers, Pink and Green</i> , c. 1890 | 157 |
| <i>The Dancing Class</i> , c. 1870 | 24-25 |

F

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Female Combing Hair</i> | 137 |
| <i>Four Ballerinas on the Stage</i> , c. 1900 | 192 |

I / K

| | |
|---|-------|
| <i>In Front of the Mirror</i> , c. 1889 | 149 |
| <i>Interior (The Rape)</i> , c. 1868-1869 | 18-19 |
| <i>Kneeling Woman</i> , 1884 | 195 |

L

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>La Toilette</i> , 1880 | 112 |
| <i>Laundress Carrying Linen in Town</i> , 1876-1878 | 48 |
| <i>Little Ballet Dancer</i> , 1880-1881 | 107 |
| <i>The Little Milliners</i> , 1882 | 116 |

M

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>The Millinery Shop</i> , c. 1885 | 130-131 |
| <i>Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando</i> , 1879 | 98 |
| <i>Mlle Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source"</i> , 1866-1868 | 13 |
| <i>The Morning Bath</i> , c. 1887-1890 | 119 |

N / O

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Nude Wiping her Foot</i> , 1886 | 127 |
| <i>The Orchestra at the Opera</i> , c. 1870 | 17 |
| <i>Orchestra Musicians</i> , 1872 | 26 |

P / R / S

| | |
|---|-------|
| <i>Portrait of Rose Caron</i> , 1892 | 134 |
| <i>The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage</i> , c. 1874 | 34 |
| <i>Scene of War in the Middle Ages</i> , 1865 | 10-11 |
| <i>Seated Female Nude Drying Neck and Back</i> | 97 |
| <i>Self-Portrait Saluting</i> , 1865 | 6 |
| <i>The Singer in Green</i> , c. 1884 | 124 |
| <i>Singer with a Glove or Café Concert Singer</i> , c. 1878 | 85 |
| <i>The Song of the Dog</i> , 1876-1877 | 58 |
| <i>The Star</i> , 1878 | 53 |
| <i>Study for Little 14-Year-Old Dancer</i> , c. 1878-1881 | 86 |
| <i>Swaying Dancer (Dancer in Green)</i> , 1877-1879 | 66 |

T

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Three Girls Sitting Opposite</i> , c. 1879 | 102 |
| <i>The Tub</i> , 1886 | 141 |
| <i>The Tub</i> , 1886 | 142 |
| <i>Two Dancers</i> , c. 1895 | 182 |
| <i>Two Dancers Entering the Stage</i> , 1877-1878 | 81 |
| <i>Two Dancers on a Stage</i> , c. 1874 | 77 |
| <i>Two Laundresses</i> , 1876-1878 | 54 |

W / Y

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>Waiting</i> , 1880-1882 | 104-105 |
| <i>Woman at her Toilette</i> , c. 1897 | 187 |
| <i>Woman at her Toilette</i> , c. 1900-1906 | 181 |
| <i>Woman Combing her Hair in front of Mirror</i> , c. 1877 | 61 |
| <i>Woman Drying Herself</i> , c. 1890-1895 | 153 |
| <i>Woman Getting Out of the Bath</i> , 1877 | 78 |
| <i>Woman Having Her Hair Combed or The Body Care</i> , 1886-1888 | 138 |
| <i>Woman Ironing</i> , c. 1869 | 14 |
| <i>A Woman Ironing</i> , 1873 | 29 |
| <i>Woman Ironing</i> , 1876-1887 | 50 |
| <i>Woman Leaving her Bath</i> , 1895-1898 | 178 |
| <i>Woman Washing in the Bath</i> , c. 1892 | 165 |
| <i>Woman with a Towel</i> , 1894 or 1898 | 169 |
| <i>Woman with Opera Glasses</i> , c. 1877 | 65 |
| <i>Women Combing their Hair</i> , 1875-1876 | 42 |
| <i>Women on a Café Terrace</i> , 1877 | 69 |
| <i>Young Spartans Exercising</i> , c. 1860 | 8 |

